



KUMO DESU GA, NANI KA?

CHAPTERS 1 - 50

01 Prologue

This is a world where the Hero and the Demon Lord have fought countless battles since time immemorial.

There has always been, and shall always be, a Demon Lord, a being of such power that its foul reign is used to mark an age. Even if one is struck down, another powerful demon will invariably rise to take its place, the demonic ruler of a new era. This is the immutable rule of this world: although the demons' onslaught can be stopped temporarily, they can never be truly defeated.

There have been many such Demon Lords, and each has been different from the last. One had such strength that it could split the earth with its mighty fists, leaving new valleys in its wake. Another had complete mastery over the darkest of magics, capable weaving over a thousand spells in concert. What does not differ between Demon Lords, however, is their insurmountable strength and their unrelenting aggression towards the tribes of man.

The Hero is mankind's only hope in the fight against the demons. So as there is always another Demon Lord, a new Hero is anointed as well when the previous one is slain. As such, the battle between humanity and the demons shifts back and forth, unceasing, even to this day. Such is the fate of this world.

An especially powerful Hero and Demon Lord fought each other, once, and were so evenly matched that they were forced to bring their full abilities to bear. They were both masters of the rare and powerful Dimensional Magic, which could warp space and time with godly power. Their great spells crashed against each other, causing the world to scream under the stress, until it erupted in a blast that obliterated both the Hero and the Demon Lord.

The aftershock tore its way through space and time until it reached another dimension. In this dimension, on a planet called Earth, in a nation named Japan, it wreaked havoc on a particular high school classroom. All twenty-six students and their teacher were killed instantly by the violent detonation. The media called it the "mystery explosion", and it was investigated thoroughly, but none of the dead would ever find out what happened.

Even after they had been reborn into their next life, they wouldn't ever find out what happened.

After all, their spirits had been torn from their own world by the dimensional riptide and drawn back into the world where the Hero and Demon King had fought. They were scattered across the land, and reborn into this new world.

This is the story of one of those souls.

* * *

Aaargh!

I try to let out a scream, but nothing comes out. What's wrong with my voice? Did I get hurt so badly that I can't even scream?!

...Okay, okay, calm down, get a grip, think. What happened? I remember that I was in the middle of Japanese Lit, then suddenly everything went white with agony. Sure, I felt like I was going to die back then, but strangely enough I'm not hurting at all right now. All I can see is pitch blackness though, so I have no idea where I am.

...Come to think of it, I can't really feel anything either. It's almost like my body is wrapped in something that's making it impossible for me to move.

Is... is this what it's like to be in a coma? Oh my god. I don't want to believe it, but it seems very, very much like this is the case. I don't really know what happened, but now I'm in a coma.

No waaay. I can think, I'm conscious, but I can't move my body, can't see, can't hear, and can't even smell anything. Am I stuck like this? I'm going to go crazy if I'm stuck like this. No way, no waaay.

Wait. What's that? I think I can hear something rustling. Okay, my ears work, good, good. That's a relief... except not, because I still can't move! If hearing is all that I can do then it's almost worse! I'm still trapped inside my own head!

Whack!

Ow! What? What?! Did something hit me? Wait! Pain! If I can feel pain, my sense of touch must be working! Okay, okay, calm down, get a grip. Breathe in, breathe out, listen to my body, figure out what else I've got. Maybe I jumped to the wrong conclusion with the "coma" thing.

I know I was just thinking that it felt like I was wrapped in something, so maybe I really am? Ha! I am! I'm all tied up! Ahaha!

This isn't really a laughing matter, though. I still have no idea what is happening. Have I been stuffed in a sack? Am I being kidnapped?

Wait, who the hell would want to kidnap a shut-in loser like me?

Anyhow. I should try to escape. I brace myself as best as I can and push hard against my bonds.

Crack!

Ah! Something broke! This doesn't really feel like a sack. What the hell is it? It's got this strange texture, kind of like it's both soft and brittle at the same time. Well, anyhow, I broke it, so I can clearly make it out just fine! Onward, to my escape!

Snap!

It's open, it's open! I crawl out, headfirst, into the open air... and come face to face with a swarm of giant spiders.

Ah. Aaah. AAAAAH?! What's with this army of giant spiders?! Every single one of them is as big as me! They're crawling out of some sort of egg-like things, one by one! This explains the noise! This explains that rustling noise!

I take a step back, involuntarily. My foot hits something and I turn to look at it. Is this... another egg? Isn't this where I just came from, though? Did I just crawl out of one of these eggs? It's not my imagination, right? This is the same kind of egg as the other ones that are spewing out that spider army, right? It certainly looks like it!

I try to look down at myself, just to see what I look like, but I can't turn my head for some reason. I try to turn my whole body, and my leg comes into view.

...It's a spider's leg.

AAAAAAAAAAAH! CALM DOWN! CALM DOWN! CALM DOWN! Is this really... is this really what I think it is? Is this one of those reincarnated-as-an-RPG-monster stories that are currently in vogue on the internet? So! Show yourself, O godlike being who has whisked me to this strange world! Bestow upon me your favor so that I may right what has been wronged!

...Okay, no god appeared, maybe this isn't a novel. Not good, not good. Well, I guess I've read novels where there isn't some sort of god or fairy waiting for the hero upon her awakening, but then again in those it's usually the boy that gets to be the hero and the girl winds up as a haughty princess-type and that doesn't look like it's the case either. Great!

I take another quick look at myself. Arranged around me, I can see thin, wiry spider legs. I try to lift one up, and it moves exactly as I will it. These are my legs, all right.

Umf.

Well, this was fun, but I guess I should face reality: this is not a dream.

Somehow, I've been reborn as a spider.

02 Looks like I'm somewhat monstrous

Well! It seems like I've been reincarnated as a spider. This sucks, but they do say that the first step towards solving a problem is admitting that problem exists. Step two: figure out what to do about it.

Crunch!

Disturbing noises snap me out of my thoughts. Ah, that's right, I'm still in trouble; better not lose track of reality. I'm still surrounded by an army of spiders (my siblings, I guess?), and now they're making strange sounds that I can't quite identify. I slowly turn back around to face them.

Crunch! Munch!

Wha?! What are they doing?! They're eating? They're eating each other?! Cannibalism! Before my eyes, my spider siblings engage in a gruesome battle for survival! This is bad! This is very bad! Brothers, sisters, why do you fight?

Ah, but it's food. It's food, and I'm hungry. To be quite honest, I'm probably about as hungry as these guys, and food is food...

Wait, no! I mustn't lose sight of reality again. I am but a pure, innocent young maiden! If I were to throw myself into that battle, surely I would be instantly ravaged by those men's evil intentions! ...Well, it's a metaphor, but the meaning is clear.

Fight
Items
Escape ←

It's times like these when one must withdraw. Me? Fight? Impossible. I've always been the quiet type who goes straight home after school, so thinking about diving in to such a violent crowd is insane! Even if I'm a spider just like those guys, I'm not going to jump in there. Yeah, if I've got time to think about such impossible things, I've got time to start running away.

Thud.

A tremor from behind me ripples through the ground. Now what?! I turn around to see what new trouble I'm in. Towering over us all is an enormous spider. Is this Mother? (Or is it Father?) Mother, why are you so enormous? Aren't you far too large to exist? If spiders that were as large as you existed anywhere on Earth, wouldn't I have heard about it?

With a crunch, the giant spider spears one of my siblings with the mighty claw on her foreleg, then pops it into her mouth like a potato chip. Mother, no! Must you do such cruel things to us as well?

I have to get out of here. The time for thought is over, the time for action is now. Escape, find shelter, survive. GO!

* * *

I fled as fast as I could, not stopping until my legs gave out and I could no longer hear the sounds of carnage behind me. Now, looking around, it doesn't seem like anyone from the spider army followed me. Good. I seriously thought I was going to die back there. Dying immediately after being born, what a joke.

Now then! I'm not in immediate danger, so let's sit down and sort out everything I've got so far.

I'm a spider now, there's no doubt about it. I didn't take my physical fitness very seriously when I was still a human, so there's no way I could have jumped like I did back there, let alone run along the walls. I definitely wouldn't have been able to push my way straight through that many spiders.

Seriously, there were way too many spiders. That was like trying to fight my way through a crowd of crazed grandmothers, trying to get the last carton of eggs on discount day at the supermarket. Well, not like I'd ever have done something so reckless to begin with...

Anyhow, while I was escaping from the spider mosh pit, I found myself running along the walls and jumping like a ninja! It was very strange at the time, but despite having eight unfamiliar legs I had no trouble moving exactly the way I wanted to. It looks like my new body has some good basic instincts, which is great. The first good news I've had so far!

So, seriously, what was with that super-enormous spider? Was that really one of my parents? I don't really know much about the ecology of spiders, so maybe there are some spiders that eat their young. Regardless, if that's my parent, am I going to get that big someday?

...Now that I've had a chance to think about it, this might not be so bad after all. Spiders are useful little bugs, right? I could definitely be way more helpful to people now compared to when I was still a human. Wait, isn't that a sad thought? Shouldn't that make me sad? Maybe I'm thinking about this too much. Not good, not good...

I guess I might be misrepresenting the huge spider's true size. After all, it's only "huge" relative to me, and I don't really have any way to figure out how small I am. If I'm as tiny as a fingertip, then the big one's a much more reasonable size than I was originally thinking, probably about the size of a tarantula. On the other hand, if I'm tarantula-sized, then... that spider is bigger than anything that's ever been discovered on Earth. Come to think of it, it's not too far-fetched to think that it could be a strange new species; after all, reincarnation is already a pretty fantastical thing so there could definitely be other fantastical things around me. I should probably avoid being too optimistic...

I should verify this. First, let's try to figure out how small I really am. Is there something around here I could use as a comparison?

I survey my surroundings. It looks like I'm in a pretty big cave. There isn't very much light at all, but the murky gloom of the cave feels just about right to me. I look around cautiously.

Ah... aha! I've found bootprints! An unmistakable trail of bootprints, marked clearly in the earth! Even better: because there are bootprints, there are travelers, and because there are travelers, there are human beings living in this world! This realization brings up such emotions within me that I can hardly contain myself.

...Although, of course, now that I've found the bootprints, the... ah, uncomfortable truth is quite plain to see. This discovery is, um, not a very comforting one.

I'm definitely bigger than a footprint.

Yeah.

If I guess that the people who left these tracks were about 170 centimeters tall, then... I'm probably about one meter long, aren't I.

Ah, yeah. I've had this sneaking suspicion ever since I saw that giant spider. No matter how I look at it, I'm definitely not any kind of spider that's been seen on Earth before. In other words, even in this world that is quite clearly different from Earth, even if the lighting were good, if someone were to look at me, they'd be right to call me a monster!!

Ah, yeah. I've had this sneaking suspicion ever since I saw that giant spider, and this confirms it. No matter how I look at it, I can't be any sort of normal spider that I would have seen on Earth. That means that, even on this world that is quite clearly not Earth, even if one were to put it nicely, it would be very reasonable to call me a MONSTER, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

03 I used to think that Appraisal was OP

“I am a spider. As yet, I have no name.”¹

What, did that sound like it came out of nowhere? Don’t be surprised! I just wanted to see how it sounded out loud. After all, it seems like I really don’t have a name. What’s that? Why don’t I have a name? Ahhh, oops, I think I skipped ahead too much. Let’s rewind a little bit so that I can explain.

* * *

I am dumbfounded by how unbelievably large I am. That’s a normal reaction, right? I was already in shock from realizing that I had been reborn as a spider, and then I had to discover I’m a monster as well. This is overwhelming! Anyone would be in despair! Anyone would be driven to suicide!

Haha, well, it’s not like I’ve actually been thinking about my own death.

Well, I don’t really have time to be overwhelmed. After all, I don’t know where I am! This world is very different from the Earth I know, so I have no idea what sort of danger I could be in. Couldn’t there be other monsters out there that are just as scary as that enormous spider?

That spider, though. If I’m about one meter long, then that thing has to be around... thirty meters? Can a human even handle a spider that big? I really hope the people who left these bootprints don’t have to fight it. Ah, no, wait! Perhaps if they had heavy weapons they could have a chance! This is a fantasy setting, right? Maybe they’ve got some sort of high-powered attack magic! That would work, right?

Hmmm, I don’t know. I should definitely think of that spider as a boss monster, though. If I don’t, I probably won’t live very long.

I was just thinking that it wouldn’t be so bad if those people fought that giant spider... but isn’t that kind of wrong? After all, it seems like, you know, that monster is my mother. I’m her widdle monster baby!

Ahhh, yeah, this is no laughing matter. I’m a spider monster! If those people found me, wouldn’t they try to kill me?

Yeahhh, probably. Definitely. What should I do? I want to know more about those people, but I know that if they find me I’m definitely toast.

Yeah, this is bad. I have way too little information about, well, everything. What kind of world is this? What are the people like? What kind of treatment do monsters like me tend to get? I want to know so many things but have no way to find them out.

Ugh! If this were anything like a novel, this is where the protagonist would start looking around using his Appraisal skill! That would be so conveni—

“You currently possess 100 skill points. The skill [Appraisal (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

What.

A mechanical voice suddenly started talking to me in my head. Ah, yeah, that makes sense. Complete sense.

¹ These lines are referencing the opening lines of *I Am a Cat*, a famous Japanese novel. “I am a cat. As yet, I have no name.”

Ahahaha! Of course! Of course this parallel world that I've been reincarnated into has such things! System messages! An Appraisal skill! This is great! I'm hype! I'm maximum hype! Yes! Yes! My answer is YES!

“You have acquired the skill [Appraisal (LV 1)]. You have 0 skill points remaining.”

I just spent all of my skill points in one go without any hesitation whatsoever. After all, I'll get more when I level up, right? This is fine. This is fine!

Because! Right! Now! I shall use my precious Appraisal skill to pull back the curtain on the mysteries of this world! ...

Ah, ahem, hold on. How do I use this thing? Let's, uh, let's try the standard method. I face a suitably interesting rock, concentrate, and think to myself, “Appraise”.

Mmm! It feels like it's working! Information is streaming into my head!

Rock

.....Uh. Huh? Is that it? No, no, no, that can't be right. I must have screwed it up somehow, it was my first try, after all. I clear my mind and try again.

Rock

.....No. It can't be. That's it? That's really it? No, no, no, no! There has to be a better explanation. Perhaps this is merely an ordinary rock! Perhaps there is nothing useful to know about this rock at all! Let's try appraising the wall next. Perhaps doing so will tell me more about the place that I'm in! Even if it only says something like “The Cave of _____” or whatever, even that would be a relief!

Wall

.....I have no words.

Perhaps I should have thought this through more. It's right in the name, isn't it? “Appraisal, level one.” It explicitly states, level one. What did I think was going to happen? I have just witnessed, first-hand, how useless a level one skill is. This might be useful if I managed to level it up... but, of course, I've spent all my skill points.

Aaaaagh! I'm an idiot! I'm a wasteful idiot! I blew all of my skill points on Appraisal without even bothering to check if there were any other skills! What if there's one that's actually usable at level one?

Wait, no, let's not beat myself up here. If Appraisal is this weak at level one, then none of the other skills should be any better. I'm going to assume that this is the case and move on. Yes, I'm moving on.

Ahhhh. No waaay. Almost as an afterthought, I use Appraisal on myself.

Spider — (no name)

Huh? It says “spider” like I expected, but “no name”...?

* * *

And, that brings us back to the top. So, that's the gist of it. I don't have a name. Well, I have a name from my previous life, but the spider that I am now was never given a name.

For now, let's put aside this worthless Appraisal skill. Well, it's not quite worthless; it has revealed a bunch of new mysteries.

“Skill Points”. These are probably points that I can save up to buy new skills. However, I have no clue how to earn them. Do creatures have levels in this world? Maybe if I raise my own level, I’ll earn more skill points. This is just a theory, though.

Levels, skills, points... this world is just like a game, isn’t it? Isn’t it?

Regardless, I’m now a monstrous spider. Living a normal life is going to be completely impossible. Well, maybe I shouldn’t think of a “normal life” in human terms, since I’m in such an unbelievable situation.² I’ve been reborn, as a spider, into a video game world! I’m a gamer, right? This will be fun! I’m going to enjoy this.

...First things first, though, I really do need to eat.

² There’s joke here that’s difficult to translate directly: the protagonist says “I can’t live a normal life”, then remarks that “life” (人生) contains the kanji for “person” (人), and that it would be more accurate to swap that out for “spider” (蜘蛛) to make “spider-life” (蜘蛛生).

04 For the first time in my (very short) life,
I'm exploring a dungeon (that I was born in)

Well then! None of my problems will be solved if I just sit here forever, so I should get going.

I shouldn't follow these bootprints. Running into the people who made them would be a huge pain in the ass, so I really should go in the opposite direction.

...But, seriously, this cave is too big.

The ceiling towers over a hundred meters above me, and the section I'm in is probably about that wide as well. The craggy rocks scattered throughout the cave sometimes disguise its size, but as far as caves go, this one is enormous.³

Currently, I'm at a sort of crossroad, where three wide tunnels join together in a Y. Behind me stretches the path I came from. The path where those footsteps lead goes off to one side, leaving me with only one path, which travels straight into the distance and out of sight. I climb on top of an especially large rock and survey the road ahead.

...What are THOOOSE?!

Scattered throughout the cave before me are countless monstrous creatures. Appraisal goes off accidentally.

Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer;
Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Deer; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat;
Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Bat; Wolf; Wolf; Wolf; Wolf; Wolf;
Wolf; Dinosaur...

...Well, uh, now that you mention it, I guess those do look kind of like deer... but the deer I'm familiar with definitely don't have horns that shine like swords. "Bat" could be used to describe those creatures flapping around, but they look less like actual bats and more like extremely ugly rats that grew demonic wings. Looking at the wolves, you'd think they were almost normal by comparison, but then you see that they've got six legs. Even the dinosaur lying against the far wall looks weird: it's like a tyrannosaurus, but with horns and scales. That's not a dinosaur, that's a dragon!

Should I try to push my way through? It's doable, right? Haha, nooo, I'm just a tiny spider that was born just a little a while ago, so I really shouldn't do anything rash. The difficulty here is definitely set to Lunatic.

Stealthily, I creep down from my rock. What should I dooo? There's a huge pile of monsters in front of me, a spider-filled hell on one side, and potentially-hostile people on the other. Am I stuck here?

Ah, wait, hold up, please, no cause for alarm. Even though all three of these paths are blocked, I've already devised a grand strategy to advance! ...Ahaha, although I say "grand strategy", I really mean that I saw another passage while I was up on top of that rock. In addition to these hugely obvious passages that make up this Y-intersection, it looks like there's a much smaller side path through a fissure in the wall. It looks like it's about three meters high and three meters wide, and there's no problem getting there from here. No,

³ *The Japanese language relies a lot on contextual cues to indicate what a sentence is referring to, and sometimes it's really damn hard for a non-native speaker to figure out what's going on. Literally, the line translates to "thanks to the rough rocks scattered haphazardly about, [I] feel things that are somewhat varied; but even so, for a cave, this is huge." What about the rocks mixes up your feelings? What's varied about your feelings? What are your feelings even of, the cave? Its width? Tell me, spider girl! Tell meeeeeee*

the problem with this particular path is that this is where those bootprints come from. If those people came from this direction, then wouldn't that lead to this cave's (or, rather, this dungeon's) exit?

Umf. The exit, huuuh... should I really try to get out of here? If I were human, it would be obvious; I'd get out without a second thought. I mean, this dungeon is way too high-level for me! I don't really know how strong I am compared to other monsters, but that quick glance I got earlier told me that getting into combat would be a seriously bad idea.

Wellll, if this were really just a game I'd be all like "dying's not a big deal lol" but this is reality! I probably won't come back if I die, so there's no way I'd put my life on the line and charge madly into battle, not without any sort of fallback plan.

If I keep that in mind, getting out of here is a pretty attractive option. Well, it's comparatively attractive, but I really don't know if it's actually that good of an idea. After all, I'm a monster. Since people travel through this part of the dungeon, there must be some sort of human settlement nearby. If a big spider like me were to show up, they'd totally hunt me down. So, yeah, there's definitely risks going outside.

On the other hand, I might find a nice, quiet place to settle down somewhere out there. Staying out of sight of the people out there would be very luck-dependent, though... and, well, now that I say that, I should really also say that survival in here would be equally up to luck. Hmm...

Ah! Got it! For now, I'll set my sights on the dungeon's exit. Once I get there, I'll check out the state of affairs, see if there's anything dangerous like a base camp for the humans, and figure out if leaving is a good idea.

We have a plan, so, LET'S! GOOO!!

* * *

...I got lost, lol. :P

Well,ahaha, how should I put it... This cave is freaking huge! What is up with these labyrinthine paths? The road has been forking crazily all over the place ever since I started. How many branches, you ask? I lost count after 10!

I also encountered a ton of monsters! Every time, I ran away as fast as I could, but I think I got turned around and I have no idea where I am anymore. What happened to the footprints, you ask? I lost track of them a while ago!

Aaaaaaahh, no waaaay. I'm lost in a maze and have no map. There's no way I'll find the exit!

Plus, I'm so hungry I can barely stand it. Someone, anyone, can you spare any food?

05 Weaving a new home

I gave up on trying to get out of this dungeon. I half-heartedly thought about wandering around for a while, but with everything in this dungeon, I'm worried that an unexpected encounter would put the "dead" back in "dead end". It doesn't matter if it's a human or a monster, they're both seriously formidable foes. Oh, um, please don't misinterpret me; when I say "formidable foe" I don't mean in the sense of, hm, "a rival I want to beat", but more in the sense of "an extremely serious threat to my life".

Fortunately (or whatever if "fortunate" isn't a good word to describe my current situation), there aren't any monsters here that are faster than me, so dodging unpleasant encounters is quite easy. My spider body has agility in spaces! I'm far, far faster than I was as a human.

Ah, sorry, I'm getting too full of myself. While it's true that I am quite fast, it is really all of my physical capabilities that are far, far greater than those in my previous life. Heh.

Well, before I was reincarnated, I really was more of the indoors-y type. "Exercise? What's that?", etc., etc. It's obvious that a wild spider would have better stats than I did before. The only parts of my body that I had bothered to hone were my thumbs, made strong by countless hours of gaming.

Let's set aside the topic of my former unathleticism. What matters now is that, in my current body, I'm pretty good at running away. Of course, running away all the time is not a really solid survival strategy. If I'm caught from both sides in a pincer attack I'm done for, and if I run into anything faster than me I'd be screwed, although I haven't seen anything like that yet.

Plus, I've been steadily growing hungrier and hungrier, and you can't fight on an empty stomach. Well, not being able to fight isn't really the problem, since I'd really rather I didn't have to. It's the "empty stomach" part that's the issue. I'd rather not starve to death.

Well, then, let's think about this for a bit. Q: What do spiders eat? A: Other bugs.

Oof... that's right, isn't it... if I'm going to sate my appetite that's what I'm looking at, isn't it... and since I'm so big, that's going to reduce my options for prey, isn't it... Specifically, my options are other monsters and, although I don't really want to think about it, humans.

I mean, my siblings got into cannibalism immediately after being born, didn't they, and that giant spider that seemed like our parent was also calmly eating its own children. It seems like the average member of my species thinks that everything on the planet apart from itself is prey. It's not like there's many other options, though, in this cave.

What do those deer-like monsters in that big passage eat? Are they carnivores, disguised as herbivores? ...man, I can't stop thinking about food. I am seriously worried about where I'm going to find my next meal.

It's time to face the facts. At this rate, I will starve to death. That's a bad thing, so I'm going to have to put up with eating whatever junk I can scrounge up. Ugh. I need to prepare myself.

It's all well and good to prepare myself, though, but step one is really figuring out what it is I'm going to be eating. Of course, there's nothing edible on hand, which means I need to go acquire myself some provisions. Now, how will I do that?

To be frank, my odds of winning in a fight are basically zero. Sure, the passages in this maze I'm in now are smaller than the huge ones from before. Sure, there's no monsters that seem absolutely unbeatable, like that giant spider or whatever that dragon-like thing was. The monsters here are only about person-sized!

Even still, it's probably not possible for me to win a fight. Why, do you ask? I have no idea how! I've never fought anything IRL before! If this was a game, I'd probably win, but pressing buttons is way different from actually moving my body. Plus, 2D and 3D are way different.

I shouldn't really be concerned about not being able to fight, though. I'm really hungry, but not to the point where I might keel over at any moment. So, since I've got a little time to prepare, let's come up with a properly spider-like way to secure me some food.

When you're talking about spiders, you have to talk about webs! Weaving a web out of sticky spider silk and ensnaring prey is totally spider-like, and a cave is a perfect place to do it, since I can stick my threads everywhere.

I have decided! Here, I shall build my new home!

First, I have to make some thread. That comes out of my butt (or whatever you call it now), right? Let's try making some.

...now that I'm paying attention, it looks like I've already got some thread. Huh?! How'd that get there? Wouldn't I remember spewing that stuff out?

Hmm. This stuff stretches all the way back the way I came. Have... have I been laying thread the entire time I've been walking around?! Aaah, this is embarrassing!! It looks like I have to focus on turning it off.

Yeeeeeah. What should I do about all this thread? I might find a use for it in the future but for now let's cut it off and get back to work.

Let's try this again... here, I shall build my new home! I've got the basics down on making thread. Now, I need to stick my thread all around the cave. I like to think I'm pretty handy, but can I pull this off?

...before I was even finished thinking that, I'd already done it. In the blink of an eye, I'd built quite a satisfactory web. This tunnel is now quite magnificently covered with an enormous spiderweb. Whoa, is this my body's instinct? As soon as I started, my body started moving like it knew exactly what it needed to do as I watched dumbfounded.

I've made my web in two parts. The top and bottom halves are separated from each other by a one-meter gap. Why, you ask? I definitely wouldn't want to cut off my own escape route, would I?

My new home is at a T-intersection, so I've built a web in each of the tunnels. I've made sure to leave a hole in each of them so that I can escape, since if I were to block them off completely I'd be trapped. I don't think there's anyone around here strong enough to break spider's silk, so I feel fine leaving these little holes.

The stupid monsters that crawl on the ground will get stuck in my lower web. The ones that try to jump or fly over it will get caught in my upper one. I've closed off all entrances, so I'm perfectly safe in here, and just in case something does break in I've left myself escape routes. Isn't this the perfect kind of place for a shut-in like me? This wonderful place I'll call my home.

06 I munched and I crunched and I have no regrets.

My new home feels so safe and secure that I dozed off before I knew it, but when the threads I had connected to my leg started to vibrate, I woke up with a start. I was kind of hoping that when I woke up I'd find that all this had been a dream, but, nope, I'm still a spider in a cave. Oh well, there goes that.

I stretch out all eight my legs as I stand up, and they rustle as they move. This is kind of gross, if I do say so myself.

Now that I'm awake, I turn my attention towards the vibrating thread. This one is attached to the lower web on the passageway to my left. It looks like, somehow, something's gotten stuck in it!

My first prey.

I carefully approach until I can see what I've caught. Tangled in the net is something whose skin is a crazy pattern of rainbow-colored dots.

Frog

Yeah, this definitely looks like a frog. Sure, it's about as big as I am, and it glitters like a rainbow, but it's a frog. This is the first time I've agreed with what Appraisal has told me about a monster. ... Well, excepting me, since it said I'm a spider.

A frog, huh... for my first catch, wasn't this a bit too easy? We don't eat anything like this in Japan, but I know there's parts of the world where people eat strange stuff like this all the time. I even remember hearing that spiders taste like chicken. I was thinking just a little while ago that I'd have to eat really disgusting food to survive, but this isn't actually so bad! If I can't bring myself to eat this, I'm probably never going to be able to eat anything else in this dungeon.

There's a slight problem, though. This frog is probably poisonous, hmm... well, no, with this vibrant color pattern, it's almost certainly poisonous. What should I do...

As I casually sit here and ponder, the frog who has been so desperately struggling against my webs launches its counterattack! It vomits up a stream of brightly-colored, poisonous-looking liquid, directly at me! Ahhh! I was too busy thinking about how to kill it that I didn't notice! It's far too late to dodge! I get covered by the noxious fluid.

Aaaargh!

Wh, what is this?! Ouch! Ouch! Is this venom? It's venom! I'm covered in venom!

Oh no, it's shooting again! Wait, wait, I'm not read— OW! I'm hit again! This pain is no joke! Retreat! Retreeeat! I run out of the frog's range, almost tripping over my own legs.

Whoa. This really hurts. Is this what it feels like to get splashed by acid? It's melting my body, isn't it? I don't have a mirror, so I can't see for certain, but this is making me pretty nervous.

Shit. I messed that up. I forgot that the thing I had caught was a monster, and I got careless. "A rat is the most dangerous when it's cornered," isn't it? A frog being hunted by a snake isn't going to just let itself be eaten.

Ahhh, well, this really hurts, but it doesn't feel like I'm going to die. The venom mostly just hit my left side. My left eye got hit and doesn't seem to be working that well anymore, so there's a chunk missing from my field of view. ...huh? My left eye got hit, but there's only a little bit missing from my field of view...? Ah, I know! Since I'm a spider, I've got eight eyes, right? Yeah, probably. This is good to know.

Well, it doesn't matter for now. This pain isn't really going away.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Acid Resistance (LV 1)].”

Whuh? The pain suddenly lessens a bit. The voice said “skill”... does this mean that I can gain skills without spending points? Why the hell did I spend a hundred points on Appraisal?! ...ugh, let's not think about this too hard.

Anyhow, it looks like I've acquired a skill that reduces acid damage. If I had to guess, I'd say I got it from taking that frog's attack. The requirements must be a bit higher than that, though, because I didn't get it immediately after getting hit. The likely answer is that, since the acid stuck to me, I kept taking damage until I met the “proficiency requirements” that voice mentioned. Right?

Let's think about this later. I've picked up some resistance, and the pain has gone down a bit. I think I'm about ready to go face that frog again. After all, it's really pissing me off. It's only food! How dare it attack me! Unforgivable! I have decided. I don't care if it's poisonous or not, I am going to eat that thing!

With that, it's time to charge in! If I don't get careless, this will be easy: it's already my prey, caught helplessly in my trap!

The frog fires a third shot at me. Heh, don't be so predictable, you're making this too easy! I dodge past the stream of acid as I approach, and let loose my own attack. Take this, frog, my special technique!

CRUNCH!

How do you like my bite, frog? Ohohoho, don't think this is any ordinary bite! I am a spider! My fangs are covered in deadly venom! (I figured this out when I realized I could make silk.) Ohohohooo, feel my venom coursing through your veins and dieeee!

Splash!

HAAAARGH!

You spit acid at me as I'm biting you?! Ow! Ow! Even with the resistance, this still really hurts! Ow!

My fangs open accidentally as I reel back.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

Ahhh, is that so?

Wait, not now, announcer lady! This frog has, not once, not twice, but THREE times covered me with its filthy venom! This is unforgivable! Even though I had no intention of sparing you in the first place, this is absolutely unforgivable!

I attack once again, empowered by my own fury. The frog writhes in agony. Ahaha! Suffer! Suffeeer! I bite it, gleefully, again and again. The frog thrashes about in pain, but in time its movements grow weak and feeble, then finally stop.

Heh. I finally defeated you. If this was my first hunt, I can tell things are only going to get tougher from here. But, for now, I did it! Yes! Time to eat!

Munch, munch, slurp, slurp. Umf, this is bitter. Painful, too. Is this bitterness from the poison? The pain's from the acid, right? Well, I've got some resistance now, so this isn't going to kill me. I can bear with it, but, ugh, this isn't tasty at all.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Acid Resistance (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

This meat may be disgusting, but this skill rank sure is sweet.

07 24/7 Vacation!

Ahh, I'm stuffed. Maybe it's because I was so hungry, or maybe it's because I need nutrients to recover from all this damage I took, but I somehow managed to eat the entirety of a frog that was almost as big as my entire body. What, that sounds like it's physically impossible? Hah hah hah, what are you saying? In this world where such mysterious phenomena as "skills" exist, you can't say that!

In fact, eating all that has caused me to swell up like a balloon. Ahhh, if I were still a human, I'd be thinking of going on a diet, wouldn't I... Come to think of it, though, when I was a human, I never really got fat even with my messed-up eating habits, so dieting isn't really in my vocabulary anyway.

First things first, let's repair the part of the net that the frog got tangled up in. Ugh, this is going to suck with my belly so heavy and swollen...

It was a struggle, but I've mended my web. No other monsters showed up while I was working, which is good! Hmm, wasn't I also way too unprotected while I was eating the frog, too? There definitely might have been some monsters nearby that would have been lured by the smell of blood. I haven't seen them in these smaller tunnels, but what about those six-legged wolves from before? Their sense of smell is probably great. I'm going to have to make sure to bring my prey back into my home before I start eating, next time.

Ahhh, I've finally taken care of the basic necessities of life: food and shelter.⁴ Hm? What about clothing? You're telling a spider to put on clothing? Ha. I don't think that's really necessary, since the temperature in here is really kind of pleasant, and I'm covered in short hairs that keep me comfortable. Plus, I don't even have anything to wear! I mean, I guess I could weave something out of my silk, but I don't think that's a very good use of my time. Even if I were to make something, how would I even put it on?

For the time being, can't I just ignore clothing? Ohh, if I do that, I've got everything on lockdown without having to work for it at all! Well, no, I guess I did have to build my home in the first place, and fighting the frog was a ton of effort, so I guess you could say that I had to work for it, huh...

...Well, as long as nothing big happens, this environment seems pretty safe. There's only really a couple things that could mess this up: someone coming through and busting down my webs, and a lack of prey coming through here and getting caught. The first one isn't so bad, since if some brave warrior comes through here knocking down my webs I can just run away and rebuild elsewhere. The second one, hm... if prey keep coming around regularly, I'll definitely be able to live my perfect shut-in lifestyle.

This is wonderful! I was definitely a huge shut-in in my previous life. When I had to go to school, I'd sit in the back of the class and avoid talking to anyone, and when the bell rang I went straight home and spent the rest of the day surfing the net and playing games. Dinner was either the kind you added hot water to and let sit for three minutes or the kind you threw in the microwave. Occasionally I'd grab something prepackaged from the convenience store, just for variety.

My parents both worked, and they came home super late, so we never really saw each other, let alone had any sort of conversation. I did the minimum amount of housework necessary to keep them off my back. To be frank, they were really just complete strangers that happened to live in the same house as me.

Thanks to that isolated lifestyle, I've always found communicating with other people to be fairly troublesome. ...Well, maybe it wasn't just my lifestyle, maybe I was just born with that kind of personality.

⁴ The Japanese word that translates to "the necessities of life" (衣食住) contains the kanji for clothing (衣), food (食), and shelter (住). The protagonist's entire rant about clothes is prompted by the fact that this word implies the need for clothing when all she needs is food and shelter. It is the opinion of this translator that the protagonist is a bit of a blowhard.

But, thanks to all that, I didn't have any friends. Even when I played MMOs, I rarely bothered chatting with other players.

As a result, my MMO characters tended to be the distant, silent type. I usually played a middle-aged bald dude, the kind of nice guy who wouldn't say much and let his actions do the talking. Stats and skills all seemed useless, so I poured everything into raising my physical attack damage and my speed, ignoring everything else. Combat was always hit-and-run; "just try and lay a finger on me," you know, that kind of thing. I dodged every attack that came at me, since my complete lack of defense meant that I would absolutely die if I got hit.

Umf. I don't care that I might not ever see my parents or my classmates again, but I'm going to miss that old bald dude. In free-to-play MMOs, a free character able to beat the paid players is a pretty spectacular sight, and it's a shame he's just going to quietly disappear.

I had more attachment to my game characters than I did to my parents. I was a terrible human being, wasn't I? Well, it's the truth. Are those people even going to be sad that I died? Ah, whatever, it doesn't matter either way. If I were in their shoes I don't think I'd mourn. I'd probably think that putting together the funeral would be a pain!

If I were to say this to anybody else they'd probably get pissed, but, really, so what? I wasn't bothering anyone, so it's really none of your business. I was bothering my parents? Hah, no, I played the stock market in my free time, which gave me enough money to live off of. Once you get a feel for it and get used to taking the risks, you can make a pretty decent living off of it. So, I definitely wasn't bothering my parents. I wasn't bothering anyone, so I didn't need to talk to anyone.

Ah, well, listen to me ramble on about things that don't matter anymore. Let me summarize in a grand declaration:

Shut-in losers are the best!

08 A spider without intelligence is just a normal spider.

Zzzzz. Yaaaaawn! Ahhh, I slept a ton! Did I oversleep? I'm feeling a little sluggish. Ahh, well, sleeping without a care in the world is the best!

How long did I sleep? Well, in my previous life I tended to sleep for about four hours a day. This, though, feels more like the time where I passed out from lack of sleep and slept through an entire day. It's hard to tell, though... humans and spiders are very different creatures, so I don't really have any way to figure out how long I was actually asleep. Yeahhh, I want a clock.

How long has it even been since I was born? I've got a vague sense that it's been two, maybe three days, but since I'm in a dungeon it's not like I can use daylight to tell.

I don't even know what kind of calendar this world uses! Maybe one day isn't actually twenty-four hours. On Earth, a year is the length of time it takes the planet to go around the sun, and a day is the time it takes for it to spin around its axis. Does this planet have exactly the same size and mass of Earth, and does it spin around its star at the same rate? It's pretty unlikely. Ah, well, that's just the explanation according to science, but in this magical parallel world, it's not entirely impossible that we're operating under entirely different laws of physics.

It's not like I can really verify it either way, though. If I ever leave this place some day I might look into it, but for now I'll just enjoy this lackadaisical lifestyle to the fullest. ...Well, maybe instead of lazing about, I should try thinking about some of the unanswered questions I've collected until now.

First off, how did I die? Ah, hm, now that I think about it, I've basically just been assuming that I'm dead. I've been working under the assumption that I suddenly died and was reincarnated as a spider, but I don't actually remember dying.

Hm?

The last thing I remember was being in Japanese Lit. Our teacher, Oka⁵, was in the middle of reading something aloud, right? I was drowsily nodding off, then suddenly there was a blast of blinding pain, then I don't remember anything after that. If I did die, it was most likely because of all of that pain, but I don't know what could have hurt so bad to begin with.

Well, the most likely theory is that I died from that mysterious pain, then I was reincarnated as a spider. If I didn't die, I could... merely be possessing this spider while my real body is comatose in a hospital bed? Oh, and this one's even crazier, but it could be that I'm a completely different person with a copy of my old memories, and my original self is still stuck in literature class.

Hmmm, I'm sure that if I kept thinking I could come up with even crazier ideas. If I wasn't really me, how would I prove it? I could try saying incomprehensible things like "I am me, therefore I am me," or whatever... It's hard to believe, but reincarnation is the simplest explanation I've come up with, so I'm going to stick with that for now. "I think, therefore I am," right? Let's just assume that I'm me.

Next up, this body that I'm in. A spider's body is surprisingly convenient! I'm not having any trouble moving around on my eight legs, and it's actually way easier for me to move around as a spider than as a

⁵ Nickname

human. I can run along walls, and, absurdly, can even walk along the ceiling. I've got a few weaknesses, though. I don't have hands, and I can't look behind me without turning around.

Not having hands is a real pity. I could use my front legs to grip things, but it's really a poor substitute. I won't have anywhere near the same precision or finesse that I did with my human hands. Plus, my legs each end in a single sharp claw, and there's no way something so dangerous could be used in place of a finger. It's a shame, but I'll be able to manage somehow.

There's only one really big problem: I can't see what's behind me.

This is extremely dangerous. Spiders don't have necks, so my head is attached directly to the rest of my body and can't turn independently. I've got plenty of eyes, so my field of view is actually quite large even if I can't turn my head, but I've got no way to see what's behind me at all. I'm incredibly vulnerable to a surprise attack.

I might try using my threads as a countermeasure. Since I can't see behind me, I'll need to rely on some other sense, and if I can keep threads spread out behind me, I could use my sense of touch to tell if there's something behind me. Ahh, well, easier said than done. I need more practice with my threads. I'm safely hiding in my home, so I don't really need an early-warning system, but better safe than sorry.

Lastly, skills. There's a million little things I want cleared up, but for now let's just focus on the big one: what the heck is a "skill"?

If I'm using game logic, a skill is some kind of ability or technique. The kinds of actions you can perform are based on the skills you have, so as you acquire more skills you can do more things. However, I don't know if this world treats skills the same way, so I shouldn't make any assumptions.

My first priority is figuring out what skills I have, and what skills I can acquire.

I have three skills that I know about: [Appraisal (LV 1)], [Acid Resistance (LV 2)], and [Poison Resistance (LV 2)]. I bought Appraisal with skill points. Those are a mystery too, huh. I spent all of my points on Appraisal, but I have no idea how to get more. If this were a game, I'd get more when I leveled up, but I don't know if this world even has things like levels. It could be that I'll get more as time passes.

Worst-case scenario? Never getting any more. Skill points may just be something an individual is born with, and you only get to spend them once. Ahh, that would be shockingly awful.

I hope that's not true!

09 Skill Inspection

Umf. Let's forget about skill points for now, since there's really no point in me worrying if I can get more of them.

Acid Resistance, huh. I got that through an entirely different method than when I picked up Appraisal. "Acid Resistance" does what it says: it makes me more resilient to acid. I got it when that annoying frog shot his acid spit all over me.

That saliva attack was probably both acid-type and poison-type. When I got hit by it, I took acid damage, which led to automatically acquiring the Acid Resistance skill. Was it because I took damage in general, or was it because it had an "acid" attribute? I also can't tell if it's because I took a certain amount of damage, or because I kept taking acid damage, or even if it was just a certain amount of time after I took the first attack.

Well, what's important here is that once I take damage of a particular type, I start to gain resistance to it. It might sting for a bit, but if I can endure it, I'll get a new skill out of it. If I took a fire attack, I'd get fire resistance, right? When I'm thinking about my defense strategies, I should make sure I think about acquiring new resistances. If I see a new attack that doesn't look like it will straight-up kill me, should I let myself get hit by it? Hmm, no, getting hurt sucks, and there's no guarantee I'll gain a new resistance after just one attack. Ah, it's not just because I don't like pain: it's always better not to take any unnecessary risks.

I got Acid Resistance when I got hit by that frog's attack, but my Poison Resistance leveled up as well. If what the, uh, "Voice of Heaven" said was true, then I had Poison Resistance from the start. Well, that makes sense: I'm a spider, and I use poison, so of course I should have resistance. Do I have any other natural skills like that? I don't think I have any way to check! If the "Voice of Heaven" hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't even know that I have Poison Resistance to begin with! There's probably loads of other spider skills that I don't know that I have.

Ahh, this is a mystery... what else could I have? I might have some sort of "Poison Strike" skill. It would be great if I could know for sure, but, y'know, I have no way to check.

Just to test, I whisper "Character Statistics" to myself, but there's no response. Maybe if Appraisal's level were higher, I could check. ...Wait. Appraisal's level... level as in... proficiency, maybe? Ah, is this a way for me to level Appraisal up?

Proficiency means the degree to which someone has mastered a skill, right? If Appraisal uses the same system as my resistance skills, then becoming more proficient at it will cause it to level up. Thus, if I use it a bunch, I should get better at it, and it will level up, right? Haha! I thought that since I bought it with skill points I'd have to spend more skill points to level it up, but I might have jumped to conclusions!

I immediately start spamming Appraisal on everything I can see. Tons of useless information like "wall" and "floor" starts pouring into my brain. Ah, this is a pretty terrible feeling, like I'm getting drunk on this deluge of information.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2."

WORTH IT! Woohoo! It's just one level, but it worked! This is a huge step forward. Trembling a little bit, I Appraise myself.

Small Lesser Taratekt — (no name)

Ohhh! Now it's even displaying my species! As before there's not very much information at all, but it's way better than the generic "spider" label I got out of it before.

But, hm. I'm not just "small", but also "lesser", huh... it's like I'm inferior, or something. What a downer! I was so happy after I got Appraisal to finally level up, but, seriously, "lesser"? I didn't have any high hopes or anything, but I certainly wasn't expecting to be lesser! Ugh, well, since I was such a loser in my previous life, I guess it's only natural that this would carry forward.

...Well then, time to Appraise everything else and get its level up even higher!

* * *

It's not leveling up. I've used it on every single wall and crag and rock I can see, and its level hasn't even gone up once. On top of that, where Appraisal had said "wall" before, now it says "labyrinth wall", which is... not particularly helpful. That's not the important part though: why isn't this leveling up at all?!

Hmmmm. Well, the first thing that comes to mind is that maybe Appraising something multiple times doesn't cause me to gain any proficiency. That's probably the case, otherwise it would be way too easy for me to grind it out in the safety of my home. Just to be sure, I Appraise everything around me again, but, sure enough, the level doesn't go up, almost like I'm not actually getting more proficient.

If that's true, then in order to level Appraisal, I'm going to need to Appraise things that are outside my home, huh... Didn't I Appraise a bunch of monsters back when it was still level one? I must have gotten a bunch of proficiency back then.

Going outside, though... what a pain. I have such a nice home here, why should I force myself to go out? It's way better to just stay here, living safely in my little web, although I guess I'm not going to get any skill ranks like this. I guess there's pros and cons, but all of the danger that I might face outside is a pretty serious con.

Yeah. I've decided. Let's stay here for a little bit longer and enjoy this lazy lifestyle until I'm sick of it. It's not like the hand of God will come down upon me if I slack off a little, right?

10 Level Up!!

While I was lazing about in my home⁶, my threads started to vibrate. It looks like I've caught my second victim! Good timing, too, I was just starting to get hungry. I approach my prey with a skip in my step. ...Honestly, though, a skipping spider is a little bit too surreal.

Last time, I was a little too careless and walked straight into my opponent's counterattack. This time, I approach much more cautiously. Now then, what do we have here?

Elro Frog

Oh, my stars and garters! Ain't this another frog? How in the heck'd this happen?! Ain't there a right pile of other monsters in this here dungeon?! Why'd I get the lousy luck of seeing this sucker twice?!

Haah, haah, hah. I dropped into my fake Southern accent, didn't I. Seriously, why'd th...

Splash!

NOOOOOOOOOO!

While I was busy doing my one-man standup routine the frog spewed acid on me. I can't believe it took me two lives to figure this out: I am a huge idiot!

Ahh, yeah, the pain helped me calm down a little bit. This time, my Acid Resistance level didn't go up, so I guess my skill proficiency wasn't raised enough. Well, that's okay for now.

I wrap the helpless frog up in my silk until it can't move an inch, and bite it. Crunch. Just like last time, this frog doesn't die from one bite; perhaps they have poison resistance. Even still, the frog grows weaker as it struggles against its bonds. I quickly drag it into my home, then spend some time fixing my broken webs.

All right, all done here. I turn my attention back to the frog as it rolls around helplessly on the floor. Looks like one bite isn't going to cut it.

Crunch!

I bite it again. Last time I wound up biting the frog over and over, but if you think about it that's probably not necessary. My fangs are coated in venom, so biting it a couple times and letting my venom do the work is just fine.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 1)], has been raised to level 2.”

Oh! A skill leveled up! And it's one I've never seen before, too. The frog stopped moving almost immediately after my skill leveled, which was a little bit surprising. Ah, but this makes sense: if my Poison Fang skill increased, then my poison must have gotten stronger as well. That's very nice!

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 1 to level 2.”

Hm?

⁶ The actual line here is more literally translated as “while I was drunk off my ass in my home...” but that doesn't make any sense in-context. The author uses the onomatopoeic expression グテグテ (dead drunk) here, but last chapter he used グダグダ (exhausted, tired). I'm assuming this is a typo, or a pun that I'm not catching, and have translated it as such.

Hmmmmmm?

Ah! Something feels weird!

Uh?! What's this?! My skin is peeling off! Am I molting? I'm molting!

“Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Resistance (LV 2)] skill has been raised to level 3 and your skill [Spider Silk (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Mmmm! No! W, wait up! That sounded really important! I was busy, and you were mumbling at me when I wasn't paying attention! Please, say it again! One more time!

Silence.

Oof. Seriously? Ah, no, no, let's keep calm and try to remember. She said “level up,” right? I wasn't hearing things? Aaah, I really wasn't paying attention, since I was unexpectedly shedding all of my skin at the time! No, wait, now that I think about it, isn't spontaneously molting kind of unusual to begin with? I wonder if this is an effect of leveling up. Did my body change at all?

For now, let's get the rest of this dead skin off of me. Whoa, check out this huge wound that was on my back! That must be from when I got hit by that frog's acid earlier. I couldn't see it at the time, but this looks really serious. Hm? Now that I'm thinking about being able to see things, it looks like that hole in my field of vision got repaired! Ohhh! I must get fully healed when I level up!

Yep. This is, without a doubt, leveling up. I feel so light and refreshed, like everything is in perfect harmony. This must have been caused by gaining experience after killing the frog, yeah? Ah, right, the frog, I should be eating. Multitasking, right.

Okay, so, let's try to remember everything, in order. The first line was definitely about my level going up. I started to molt immediately after that, so I really wasn't paying that much attention while the “Voice of Heaven” kept mumbling. Remember, remember... ah! Skills! There was something about my skills going up, right? Not just once, but two at a time right? ...what's up with that?

Oh! Right! There was something right before the skills. Something about... bonus proficiencies? Ah! Right! Bonus proficiencies from leveling up, or basically bonus points that I get for free whenever I level! That would explain why two skills leveled up simultaneously.

The skills that went up were, hm... Poison Resistance and... Spider Silk? Hmm, even my silk is from a skill, huh...? I only really found out about it when I leveled, though. Hmm, if I just keep spinning thread, this is going to be super easy to level up. This is great information!

Also, when I leveled, I was fully healed. It feels kind of like my stats have gone up too. But the most important thing is that I get bonus skill proficiency when I level! I don't know how much I get, but since I got ranks in two different skills at the same time, it's probably a pretty decent amount, right? Looks like getting levels is a pretty efficient way of getting skill ranks as well.

Levels, though. I was kind of hoping that they existed since I found out about skills, but they seriously exist! This world really is like a game, though I try not to treat it as such. Living my life as if I were in a game is kind of a scary concept, you know? It might be a bit too late, though. I can't help but already be a little bit excited about all of this. After all, I'm a gamer down to my core.

S1 The final day of our ordinary lives

It had been an extremely ordinary day. All I expected to do was go to school, hang out with my friends, go home, play some games, take a bath, and go to sleep. That, at least, was how it was supposed to go.

* * *

I walked to school, rubbing sleep out of my eyes. I stayed up way too late last night playing an MMO, and I was paying the price this morning. I had somehow managed to get into a party with Baldy, and I completely lost track of time as we farmed dungeon after dungeon.

Baldy, by the way, was a kind of famous character in the MMO that I played. He was a quiet, older gentleman with a bald head who pushed the limits of what can be accomplished as a free-to-play character. He completely ignored status and romance, focusing instead on raising his physical ability to its extreme. He was a ridiculously amazing player, too, able to dance around the front lines of a battle without breaking a sweat. On top of that, he barely ever said a word in chat. His quiet, almost manly playstyle made him very popular with other players. I finally managed to get into a party with him, so it was only natural that I got a little too excited stayed up way too late.

I arrive at school, stifling a yawn as I enter the classroom.

“Hey,” says my classmate Kyouya as I get to my desk.

“Oh, hey,” I reply.

“Yo!” says Kanata, “Whoa, what’s up? You look awful.”

Kyouya Sasajima and Kanata Ooshima were two of my classmates. We played a bunch of the same MMOs, so we were pretty good friends.

“Oh, yeah, check this out. Last night I got into a party with Baldy.”

“Whoa, seriously?”

“Yeah, seriously,” I reply. “I stayed up waaay too late playing with him.”

“Wow, I’m jealous. That was after I quit?” asked Kanata. We’d been playing together, but he had to go to bed and logged out well before I did. “Fuck, if I knew that was going to happen I would have stayed on a little longer.”

Kanata seemed really upset with himself, but in truth we never would have seen Baldy without him. We needed another person to fill the slot Kanata had left, and Baldy answered our messages in LFG.

“So, you really saw Baldy, huh? What’s he like?” asked Kyouya.

Memories of Baldy’s gallant figure flashed through my mind. “That man cannot be human,” I said. “Can you believe that he was able to advance while completely dodging the Bezebel Witch’s spells?”

The Bezebel Witch was a particularly nasty boss found in high-level dungeons. She was known for firing out a ludicrous barrage of magic attacks. The forums keep calling it a bullet hell. The worst part about this boss is that she never stopped firing. Attackers would be hit by wave after unceasing wave of magic blasts. Ordinarily, what you would try to do is either massively buff your magic resistance and try to whittle her

down via suicide attacks, or set up a super-defensive front-line and fire equally large swarms of magic back at her.

Baldy, on the other hand, dodged every blast, got close, and killed her with melee damage. This was completely and utterly unexpected. My mouth actually hung open as I watched him go.

“Wow, that’s Baldy for you. I guess that’s why people call him Kartikeya⁷,” said Kyouya.

“Man, you have to have serious skill to pull off a crazy stunt like that,” said Kanata, tapping his arm. Certainly, I know that if I had the same stats and gear that Baldy had, I wouldn’t be able to do anything like that. “Man, I want to get better!”

“Want to grind out a few more levels after school?” I ask.

“Yeah, definitely!”

“Me too. Let’s find a particularly nasty place and train a bunch.”

* * *

“Hm?” I said as I rummaged around in my bag, trying to find my pencil case. I realized, a bit too late, that I had taken it out so that I could write down a few notes as I was playing last night and never put it back. “Ah, crap...”

“What’s wrong?” asked Yuika Hasebe, who was sitting next to me in class.

“I forgot my pencil!”

“Oh no, sorry to hear that. Would you like to borrow mine?” she asked, holding up a spare mechanical pencil.

I took it, gladly. “You’re a lifesaver.”

“You owe me one!”

“Haha, okay,” I said, smiling wryly.

That promise was not one I would be able to keep.

It happened in the middle of literature class, while I was fighting valiantly against falling asleep. Our very short teacher, who we affectionately called Oka-chan, was standing at the front of the class, textbook in one hand, reciting some sort of classical poem. Most of the class was reading along in their own textbooks.

In an effort to stay awake, I forced myself to look up. In the row in front of me, I saw Spooky, another one of my classmates. Spooky wasn’t her real name, but she looked like she belonged in a haunted house so we called her that. She was extremely gaunt, deathly pale, always wore a gloomy expression, and was generally a creepy sort of girl. I felt bad thinking about her like that, but there wasn’t really any polite way to put it. As if she was mocking my efforts to stay awake, Spooky was fast asleep at her desk. I made myself look away.

That’s when it happened.

It was kind of like a fissure, floating in the empty air in the middle of the classroom, that nobody seemed to have noticed but me. It was hard to describe it as anything else but a crack in space. It was growing, too, and looked like it was going to split open at any moment. I saw it spreading through the air above me, but

⁷ Kartikeya is the Hindu god of war, known, among other things, for his speed. His Japanese name is Idate (韋駄天).

couldn't do anything but stare blankly at it. Even if I had reacted differently, I don't think there's anything I could have done about what happened next.

In an instant, the space around us shattered in a blast of glorious light, and I was enveloped by blinding pain. That's when I — no, we — died.

11 Spinnin' some threeeead, spinnin' some threeeead! ♪

I've got some thread wound around my forelegs. It stretches when I pull them apart, and snaps back together when I relax. Awesome. It's stretchy like rubber, just as I was hoping.

What am I doing? Glad you asked. Ever since I found out that my spider silk has a skill associated with it, I've been trying various experiments to raise my proficiency. Until now, I haven't really been trying to use my threads for anything but building webs and tying up my prey, so I truly had no idea what these were capable of.

Hm? What happened to going outside and leveling up, you say? Haha, as if. I may have gotten a little bit excited immediately after I leveled up, but after I calmed down I realized how foolish it was. Think about it: I'm a girl who's only good at video games. Do you seriously think I'd be good in a real fight? As if. I might have a monster's body, but I still barely know how to move it.

There's a world of difference between playing a game and actually moving my body. For starters, a game character doesn't get tired, while a real body runs out of stamina if you move too much. Back on Earth, for instance, I was a very frail girl who got tired just walking to and from school. If I had to fight a monster with real, natural-born monster instincts, I think it would be very difficult for me to win, wouldn't it?

Therefore, my current plan of letting prey get stuck in my webs has a much higher chance of success. Compared to aimlessly wandering around the dungeon, this is not only safer but far more efficient as well. I'm sure there may come a time where I have to leave my home, but I first want to get my level up a bit until I have a much bigger margin of error. I may have played an absurdly specialized character in that MMO, but in other RPGs, I usually prefer to do a bunch of early grinding to get my levels up. That way, I can just steamroll every boss in my way while I whistle a jaunty tune. Now that it's my own, precious life, I'd much rather play it safe until I think I'm strong enough to beat everything easily.

So, as part of my plan to safely get my level up, I'm trying to raise the level of my spider silk skill. My silk is my lifeline, right? If I hadn't made my home, I'd still be lost wandering around the dungeon. The thought sends shivers down my spine. I wouldn't have been able to survive like that, would I? I wouldn't have any safe place to rest, nor would I be able to catch any prey. I owe this pleasant lifestyle entirely to my wonderful silk.

Thus, I think leveling up my silk is my best course of action. I don't know how it might change as I gain more levels, but I can't think of any downsides. Just spinning more thread didn't seem to raise my skill at all, so I've been trying various experiments to see what its properties are. I've tried to see if I have any control over its various properties, like its thickness, adhesiveness, strength, and elasticity.

Controlling the thickness was extremely simple: if I think about spinning thin thread, thin thread comes out. I can't make it so fine you can't see it, but I can make it about the thickness of a human hair. In the dim light of the dungeon, such a thin thread should be almost impossible to see. I did a little test on its strength, and as expected it gets a lot less resilient as it gets thinner. Ah, well, it can't be helped. It's only natural that a thin thread would be more fragile than a thick one. Hopefully, when my skill level goes up, the threads will get stronger.

Conversely, making the thread thicker makes it way stronger. The thickest thread I can produce is nearly two centimeters in diameter. It's almost like a rope, isn't it? Well, two centimeters is about all I can produce under normal circumstances, but if I braid a bunch of it together I can get a much thicker cord. That takes time, though.

My adhesion experiments went... poorly. It's true that there are both sticky and non-sticky kinds of spider thread, but the real reason why spiders don't get stuck in it is because they know what they're doing. I can move around my webs just fine on instinct, but when I tried to figure things out manually, I somehow managed to tie my entire body up. Ahhhhhh, yeah. It's only natural that things would get tangled up when trying to learn how to use different kinds of thread, but it's my own stupidity that got me tied up.

Ahh, I was too impatient. I hadn't yet noticed that I could reduce the stickiness of my threads after I spun them, and I almost died thanks to getting caught in my own trap. That would have been way, way, way too dumb of a way to go out. Thanks to a stroke of divine inspiration, I realized that, as long as the thread's still attached to my butt, I can change its properties. After I disentangled myself, I tested to see if I could change the properties of a thread after I'd cut it, but it doesn't look like that's the case.

After I pulled myself together, I experimented with the silk's strength. While I did confirm that thin threads are weak and thick threads are strong, I have no idea what the maximum strength of these threads actually are. How could this be, you ask? When I crank the strength up to the max, I'm completely and utterly incapable of breaking it with my own strength. Even scarier, I can't slice or bite through it. Anything that gets caught up in this thread will probably be stuck there forever. Ah, well, there might be monsters that are strong enough to tear through it, so I shouldn't be too overconfident.

Last but not least, the results of my elasticity test: this stretchy, bouncy thread that I've got wrapped around my forelegs. Yeah. This rubbery silk is going to be super useful. If I could find suitable rocks to attach to it, I could make a simple slingshot, and I'm sure I'll come up with many other uses for it.

I'm quite satisfied with my experimental results. However, even after all that, my skill level didn't go up at all. Plus, I found out about a huge issue with my silk-spinning that I can't ignore: making these threads consumes my energy like mad. As a result, even though it's been barely any time since I killed that frog, I'm already exceedingly hungry. It's not like my fuel efficiency is terrible, but if I'm going to be spinning such large quantities of thread in the future, I'm definitely going to need to eat a bigger lunch first.

12 A tearful reunion (lol)

Aaaaahh, I'm hungryyyyy, but nothing's gotten caught in my web so I can't eat! I've got no other way to fix this, so I'm just going to lie down and try to conserve my energy. Hey! This is definitely not just me being lazy again.

* * *

I thought I was going to be able to sleep as much as I wanted, but I'm rather rudely woken up when one of the threads I had attached to my webs started to vibrate. Did I catch something?! My fleeting joy turns to impatience in an instant. Since I'm connected to my webs, I can tell what's happening to them just by feeling their vibrations, but this is a kind of vibration I've never felt before.

Something is touching my web, that's for certain, but it's definitely not caught in it. It's almost... like... something's walking on it?

Impossible. Sure, I was prepared for the possibility that there might be some strong creatures that could break right through my webs, but I hadn't even thought to imagine that something could just casually walk around on them like it was nothing!

I freeze up under these unexpected circumstances, and fail to react in time. Something has already slipped through my webs and is encroaching upon my territory. This is bad. I already decided that I was going to run away if something broke through my webs, but now I find myself face to face with this guy. I was too careless. I wasn't 100% awake yet and got thrown way off-kilter by this unexpected thing happening. For the first time since I built my home, I feel danger.

Small Lesser Taratekt

The thing before me is another spider monster, just like me. It looks like, since we're the same species, it can move through my webs easily.

Hello, Brother. Well, rather, you're probably my sibling, but I don't really know if you're my brother or sister or whatever. This is the tearful reunion of two siblings separated at birth! Except a little more life-threatening.

Wait, wait, wait, wait, slow down. I just met this guy, there's no guarantee that he's actually my enemy! Sure, the other spiders may have been eating each other as soon as we were all born, but maybe now our familial bond will kick in.

Rustle, rustle. Hissss!

Ah, yeah, this guy's an enemy. He's just posturing though, not attacking yet. It seems like he's looking back and forth, taking in the layout of the place.

What should I do? I don't think running away will work. We're the same species, after all, and probably thus have the same sort of physical abilities. I've stayed alive thus far thanks to my speed at running away, but if this guy is as fast as I am then there's no way that's going to work. Even if I do manage to run away, I won't even be safe then! There are countless monsters lurking around out there, outside of the safety of my home. I'm already super hungry, so if I exhausted myself by running away at top speed I would be in serious danger outside. Even if I managed to get away safely, and even if I still had barely enough energy to build a new home, I'd still have to find a good place to put it, and wandering around exhaustedly is straight-up suicidal. Running away is a terrible idea.

Well then! It looks like my only option is to beat this guy. How should I do that? Can I even win? It feels like I'm at a bit of a disadvantage here. We're the same species, so our physical ability should be roughly the same... that is, if our levels are the same.

This guy was born at about the same time I was, so I'm guessing that there can't be that much of a difference between us. We're probably no more than one level apart, tops. This guy, though, has probably been wandering around outside while I've been staying in my home, so he's probably got at least one level on me.

Worst-case scenario, this guy might not actually be my sibling, and is instead a grizzled veteran born long ago. If that's the case, his level is absolutely going to be way higher than mine. If he's been alive long enough to reach the point where he can walk around unhindered, then I have zero chance at all.

Whatever the case, this is going to be a life-or-death battle. I shouldn't worry much about this guy's level at this point, all I can do is try my best. If that's not good enough, well, it's been fun, but that's the end of my short little spider life. Dying would suck, but I know first-hand that reincarnation exists, so I've got hope that there's another world after this one.

All right, I've prepared myself. Time to focus on this battle. Clear my thoughts, focus only on my enemy. My foe seems to have finished his preparations as well. He shifts his weight backwards a little bit, as if preparing to leap.

Exactly as I predicted, he jumps high into the air. As he plunges down at me, holding the claws on his forelegs high, I give him a pitying look. I step back quickly, firing threads at my mid-air opponent. This guy has made a serious mistake. Not only is he flying through the air, unable to dodge, but he chose to attack with his claws instead of his much more powerful venomous fangs. Don't get me wrong, our claw attacks aren't that bad. Their main use, though, should really be to restrain a foe, and not a primary weapon. As spiders, our chief weapons are our venom and our silk. Against a scrub like this who doesn't even understand that, there's no way I can lose.

I snare my brother easily with my threads as he soars over me. Entangled, he crashes to the ground. I waste no time in running up to him.

Chomp!

I bite him again and again with my envenomed fangs. It seems like he's got Poison Resistance like I do, but it doesn't really matter. I've got him all tied up, so my victory is assured. I've got all the time in the world to pump him so full of toxin that it exceeds his resistance.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 2)], has been raised to level 3.”

Thanks to all of the venom I've injected into this guy, my skill leveled up. At about the same time, my brother's life finally faded away. Brother, I will never forget you! You were the first fool to break into my home.

13 I've earned an extremely disgraceful title

Somehow, I managed to get through my brother's unexpected invasion. Oh my god. I am so glad that he was such an idiot. A serious fight would have been seriously dangerous.

I'm starting to get a feel for my own strengths. If this were actually a game, I could pull up my stats, but instead I'm fumbling around, trying to figure things out objectively. I've already determined that my best weapons are my silk and my venomous fangs: I tangle up my foe in my silk, and then put an end to them with my fangs. Unfortunately, my invincible secret combo technique might not actually work on some foes. I'm pretty screwed if that's the case.

This applies not just to me, but to every other spider monster: silk and poison are our most important weapons. That idiot I just fought didn't understand it at all. In a battle between spiders, whoever immobilizes their opponent wins, so the core of my strategy was to stick a thread to them and get them all tangled up. The result is this train wreck. Why the hell did you throw yourself at me without any sort of plan? You're stupid! You're an idiot! You're going to get yourself killed! Heh, well, that already happened.

I'm actually kind of impressed that a guy this stupid survived for so long. I've been thinking that it's far too dangerous for me to venture too far out from my home, so how the hell did this guy manage to survive for so long with all those monsters out there? Ah, well, thinking about it too hard won't get me anywhere, because this guy is already dead, heh heh.

Hmm, what fate shall befall this jerk, whose corpse litters my territory? You should know this already. I'm hungry. The thought of eating a spider might be kind of gross, but I already put that kind of thinking aside when I had to eat that first frog. Hmm? He's my brother? So what? It's already been well established that my species is cannibalistic.

That said, let's dig in.

* * *

Phew, I'm full. This might sound weird, but that was definitely a bit tastier than the frogs. Hmm, is it really that after all? The frog's meat was both poisonous and acidic, was that why it was so bitter? Well, spider meat is still poisonous, so it was still pretty gross, but at the least it wasn't quite as bad as a frog.

As I came to this conclusion, the mechanical voice of the "Voice of Heaven" resounded in my head.

"You have earned the title [Filth Eater⁸], and have been awarded the skills [Poison Resistance (LV 1)] and [Decay Resistance (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 3)]."

"You have earned the title [Kin Eater], and have been awarded the skills [Taboo (LV 1)] and [Corruption Magic⁹ (LV 1)]."

What?! What the hell is this? I'm usually surprised whenever I hear the "Voice of Heaven", but this time I'm not just surprised, I'm dumbfounded. Ah, let's take some time and calm myself down. Lately, I've taken to spinning thread into little white balls to soothe my nerves. Ahh, that's better.

Alright, hm, she said "title". Those are like bonuses you get when you meet some special requirements and earn an achievement, right? That's probably it, but, uh, these are pretty gross. Disgraceful, even. "Filth

⁸ More literally, "Eater of Bad Things" (悪食).

⁹ 外道魔法 is more directly translated as "heretical magic" or "demonic magic", but Corruption Magic more accurately captures the tone.

Eater”? That’s insulting! “Kin Eater”? That’s straight-up awful! Can other people see these? Maybe someone with high Appraisal skill can. Wow. Man, if anyone saw these I’d be done in an instant. Well, I’m a monster, so I’d probably be attacked long before anyone bothered looking at my titles.

Putting aside how awful these titles are, aren’t they kind of unbelievable? In a single moment I got four skills! Four! I already had poison resistance, but the “Voice of Heaven” made it sound like the new skill got rolled into my previous skill’s proficiency rating. Ahhh, I really wish I had an easy way to check, not knowing for sure is super inconvenient! I need to get Appraisal’s level up.

I’m way more interested in the other three skills. Decay Resistance is pretty understandable, I think. I’d probably raise its level by eating decaying or rotting things, although I can’t ever see myself wanting to. The other two skills are the problematic ones.

“Taboo”? That’s certainly the name of the skill, but I have literally zero clue what it does. I can’t even make a wild guess! Hello? GMs? Can I get an explanation, please? If I don’t know what this does, I can’t use it!

Corruption Magic is the same problem. I have no idea how to use this! What should I do, chant some sort of dark incantation? I’m a spider! I can’t speak! All I can do is make this raspy sort of noise by grinding my teeth together. Man, even if I could talk I have no idea what the incantation even is, so it’s not like that would fix any of my problems.

Just to test it out, I clear my mind and concentrate on the words “Corruption Magic”.yep, nothing’s happening. I can’t use this!

Ugh! I thought that getting all of these skills and titles was going to be great, but the only useful thing I got out of it was Decay Resistance! Well, I guess my Poison Resistance may have gotten a proficiency boost, even if it didn’t go up in level. ...now that I think about it, those were both from Filth Eater, weren’t they? Kin Eater, what good are you?!

Ah, I just realized, if you earn Kin Eater by eating a family member, all of my siblings who survived that battle back when we were born probably have that title too. Hmm, but if that’s the case then that idiot I just killed should have had that title too. I guess the Kin Eater title doesn’t really have much effect on combat ability, then, so it wouldn’t matter that I can’t figure out how to use it. Ahh, I see! This must be because it was so easy to acquire. If it’s easy to get, its effect will be low.

Still, finding about this title system is pretty huge! Earning a bunch of titles might be a very efficient way to pick up a bunch of skills. I don’t really know what new titles I can acquire, or how I might go about earning them, but let’s try a bunch of different things to check!

14 Weaving a better home

Some time has passed since my brother's attack.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Spider Silk (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

Thanks to how much I've been playing... ahem, practicing with my threads, the skill has leveled up a few times. Ahhh, but it's been really slow-going, though. Thanks to all that, my home is now completely covered in pure white silk.

My home is completely different from how it was when I first made it. Firstly, there are far more webs now than there were before. When I first built it, I only built webs immediately around this T-junction I'm in now, and they were mostly just composed of nets placed high and low. Now, I've got webs stretching all the way out along each passage until the next intersection, and I've changed up the composition a bunch. I figured that there must be other creatures out there able to slip past my webs as easily as my dear, departed brother did, I might as well put a ton of them in their way so that they'll be slowed down a bit. Just that alone makes my home a much safer place.

Doing all that wasn't enough to raise my skill level, so next I freshened up the walls a bit. I've covered them in enough silk to paint them absolutely white. Don't think this is just ordinary wallpaper, though! They're attached to the rest of my webs, so if anything gets caught in a web the wallpaper will come free and wrap up my prey. After many, many failed experiments, I have finally perfected these stupendous traps!

Shortly after I started putting up my wallpaper, my skill level went up by one. After I finished covering the walls, it was time for the finishing touch: carefully stringing invisibly fine threads around the entirety of my home. These threads weren't the slightest bit sticky, but they snap at the slightest touch. They're so weak that they'll snap on their own after a while, just from slight changes in the air currents, and will then eventually stick harmlessly to the wallpaper. I wasn't able to make a thread this fine before, but it looks like I gained even more control after my Spider Silk skill leveled up to five.

The main purpose of these threads is to alert me to any incoming enemies. I've attached myself to them, so I'll feel the vibration is anything even brushes against them. These enemy-detecting threads are my solution to the extremely inconvenient problem of not being able to see behind me, and I've strung them up everywhere so that I don't have to worry in the slightest about surprise attacks from the rear. Eventually, I'd like to figure out how to operate these remotely so that I can start feeling out areas outside my home.

Of course, after I finished all of this, I had completely run out of things to do. I turned to spinning a bunch of silk with no particular goal in mind, which thankfully pushed my skill proficiency over the edge to level six. This now lets me produce silk of unbelievably high quality, which I've been using my free time to turn into little balls of silk for later use. If I sold these to humans, I could make a ton of money, you know? Haha, well, I have no idea what their textile industry is even like.

Incidentally, spinning all of this silk did, of course, make me hungry, so I ate all of the pitiful little creatures that wandered helplessly into my webs. They were all, unfortunately, poisonous, which made finishing them off a huge pain thanks to their built-in resistance to my venomous fangs. Once they were caught in my web, though, my victory was all but assured. I'm pretty sure, though, that I wouldn't be able to win against these guys at all if I didn't have my webs. I have to bite things over and over to have any effect, and an unrestrained foe would have plenty of time to counterattack while I was busy.

Thanks to all of that poison, though, my Poison Resistance skill leveled up to five, and my Poison Fang leveled up to four. I don't know if it's thanks to Poison Resistance, but I'm starting to get used to the bitter taste of this meat.

Let's see, so far I've caught three "Elro Randanels", one "Elro Pekatot", one "Elro Basilisk", and one, uh, "Finjagoat". All of them got caught in my web, and I dispatched them all with my poison fangs. The three Randanels showed up at the same time, which caught me a little off guard, but thanks to my amazing web-weaving skills I caught and killed them all quite easily. The Pekatot looked kind of like a penguin and a pelican had a baby, and that baby had weird monkey-like arms. The Finjagoat looked kind of like a bee, but it was super huge, nearly three meters long! It nearly filled up the entire hallway. Of course, thanks to that, it got tangled up in even more of my webs.

The most dangerous of them all was the Basilisk. It was a huge, lizard-like monster that, true to its name, had a petrification attack. Just like in the fairy tale, it hit me with its petrifying gaze and turned one of my front legs to stone. Luckily, the rate at which the petrification spread was very low, so I was able to kill it off before it became too much of a problem, but that was still the most formidable prey I've caught so far. Until I leveled up and shed my skin, I had to live with a petrified leg. Sure, picking up the Petrification Resistance skill may have made this a net plus, but this was even more dangerous than the frog was!

Ah, I may have perhaps glossed over it just now, but I did, in fact, level up. I did so three times, in fact! I am now level five. The skills that I know I have are Poison Fang at level four, Spider Silk at level six, Appraisal at level two, Taboo at level one, Corruption Magic at level one, Poison Resistance at level five, Acid Resistance at level two, Decay Resistance at level one, and Petrification Resistance at level one. Even though I went up three levels, my skills have barely gone up! Appraisal hasn't even budged from level two. It looks like I might have overestimated how many bonus proficiency points I got on level up.

I missed this when I first leveled up, but it looks like I gain skill points whenever I gain a level, although it doesn't look like I get very many. I got really excited when the "Voice of Heaven" said I got skill points, but I was left seriously disappointed when I tried to actually spend them. I racked my brain, trying every convenient RPG skill I could think of like "Item Box" or "Automatic Regeneration", but I couldn't pick up any of them. I couldn't even find out if they truly existed! Every time I asked, the only response I got back from the "Voice of Heaven" was **"Insufficient skill points."**

Looks like plan "buy every skill and become undefeatable" is a no-go: picking up skills might be a little harder than I thought.

15 Forced from Paradise

Today is another blissfully lazy day. Ahhh, my home is so luxurious! Food just wanders right into my lap and my webs keep the riffraff out, so I can sleep peacefully even in this dangerous dungeon. I've covered the hard stone floor with a fluffy bed of threads, so sleeping is super comfortable. My daily routine basically just consists of lazing around and spinning thread. Ahh, bliss.

Thinking about it, my previous life was quite hectic! I didn't think much about it at the time, but, seriously, only four hours of sleep? I woke up super early to go to school, and stayed up playing video games until I could barely stay up at all. That was my life, huh... I really loved playing games, but now that I look back on it, I wonder if maybe I was doing it because I felt like I had to.

I was one of the top players in that MMO, even though I was only a free player! I might have felt like I needed to live up to my reputation, and that might have pushed me past my capacity. Living up to other people's expectations, though? What a joke! That's just raw self-conceit. I don't really give a shit about other people. I mean, well, that's what I thought, but maybe even I had some faint traces of human emotion, even if I'm only finding out about it in hindsight.

But, now, in my new life, I have nothing meaningful to do at all! I feel like I've finally thrown off my shackles. When I started out, I was a little worried that I'd go crazy from all the free time, but it looks like I was just overthinking things. Sure, I might not have MMOs to occupy my free time, but it's not like I'm bored out of my skull.

Somehow, it looks like my standards of happiness are a little bit lower compared to other people's. Seriously, just being alive is great! I don't have to worry about food or shelter, which is extremely great! I would be perfectly content living my entire life like this. I don't really know how long spiders live, though.

Unfortunately, as much as I would hope otherwise, it's basically guaranteed that something is going to force me out of my home. It could be some unexpected event, a change in the environment, or something awful breaking through my nest. I don't know just what it will be, but I know it's got to be coming. It's inevitable. I should make sure I'm ready.

* * *

Yeah, okay! I said it! I said I would get myself ready! But this is way! Too! Soon!

Before my panicked eyes, one of the entrances to my home is catching fire. I had been gradually drifting off to sleep, but suddenly I saw flames start to rise. The home I had put so much effort into building was slowly being consumed by a sea of flame. Is my much-vaunted invincible thread weak to fire?!

What started the fire, though? That's easy: a human. Standing before the flames is a human man. A man, holding a torch. A torch that almost certainly was used to set my web ablaze.

This is bad. I can't really see it through the flames, but behind that man I can make out the forms of even more people. This fire can't have been an accident. They were totally on a lookout for spiderwebs. If that's the case, then they must be on the lookout for the spider monster inside it. Me.

If I stay here, I've got only two options: be swallowed by the flames or be cornered by the humans. Either way, I wind up dead. Luckily, the flames haven't reached where I am yet, so I can leave through one of the other entrances. I don't think the humans would be able to catch up to me if I did that.

I look around my home one last time. I've spent most of my life here, since I was reincarnated. I poured my sweat and tears into building it. I discovered so many things here, both good and bad. It had kept me safe for

so long! I've spent so much time in it that I might even love it even more than I did my room in my previous life.

I take off, running away from the fire, skillfully slipping through my complicated network of spiderwebs. This is it, the last web. Once I pass this, there's no turning back. Once I pass this, there's nowhere safe to run to anymore.

Even so, without hesitating, I dive under my final web. I suppress the urge to turn around and look. For now, I must get as far away from here as I can.

And thus, I was driven from my home.

* * *

This might be a bit of a digression, but the adventurers that chased me away didn't burn down my entire nest. The center was left largely unscathed, and in it they found the stockpile of fine silk balls I had been spinning. The adventurers retrieved it from the dungeon, and the clothes made from my silk fetched an absurdly high price. The king of a fairly major country even purchased some of it, which made the news.

I only found out about this much later, of course.

16 Leaving the nest!

Trudge, trudge.

My footsteps are heavy. I ran as fast as I could until my legs gave out, but I'm still in serious shock. My precious home is gone! I thought nothing could shake me anymore, since not even becoming a spider and having to eat terrible food could disturb my iron heart, but now I feel like my soul's been ripped out.

Aahhhh, I knew the day was going to come when I would have to leave my home, and I was planning on preparing myself for it, but now that it's actually happened the shock is way worse than I had thought. I thought that I was going to have a little more time, so this is a really serious blow. I had wanted to stay put at least until I hit level 10!

Mmmngh. Mmmmmnnnghhhh. MmmmmmmMMMMMNNNNN... GAH!

Right!! The time for hesitation is over, the time for action is now. Let's shift gears.

First things first: figure out my next step. I have three options:

1. Find another place in the dungeon to build a new web
2. Wander around the dungeon like I'm doing now
3. Look for the exit

That's all I can come up with on such short notice. Option 1 is probably the best in terms of safety, but I think I'm going to rule it out.

My home was amazing, almost like a dream. All of my basic necessities were completely taken care of, and I barely had to work for it. It was a perfect paradise, wasn't it? But maybe keeping myself sitting idly in there was making me weak, both physically and emotionally.

Since my home made hunting so easy, I was slowly turning into a good-for-nothing idiot who didn't know how to deal with unexpected situations. This time, though, I'm going to be mindful of that. As I am now, if anything comes crashing through my next web, I'm just going to have to run away again.

That absolutely won't do. If all I can do is run, then I'm going to have to deal with moments of frustration and sadness like this forever. When those people burned down my home, they lit a smoldering feeling in my heart. I am not going to be the kind of person that runs away from things. Yeah, that's unforgivable.

All I could think about while my home was burning around me was how there was nothing I could do but flee. Yeah, that's right, I had always been thinking that I would run away if something dangerous came. But now, now that I've run away? I'm so full of regret and shame that I want to tear myself apart. Could I do something like this again? Absolutely not, I wouldn't be able to bear it.

What's really making my blood boil is that my home wasn't just some convenient place for me to live. It was near and dear to my heart. It might sound a little cliché, but I really felt like I belonged there.

Back on Earth, I really didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. My home was falling apart, and I never really fit in at school. Games were great, but ultimately they were just fiction. I didn't really have anywhere to belong, so I adopted a rebellious, "fuck you, who needs to belong anyway" sort of attitude.

My home was something that I made, for my own sake, without worrying about what anyone else might think. It was a place just for me.

It was taken from me, and it felt like they were plundering my very existence. If I were to surrender here, I'd never be able to be proud of myself again. Why the hell was I thinking that just being able to live was bliss? That's the philosophy of a naive idiot who grew up in a peaceful Japan. Living without pride isn't living at all! I'm going to carve this deep into my soul.

My home was stolen from me. My pride has been wounded. I will become stronger, and I will redeem myself. Secluding myself in a new home and sticking to the safe hunting methods is no longer good enough. I need to get some real combat experience.

The two options I have left are either wandering around the dungeon or searching for the exit. It's not like it's much of a choice though, those two things aren't very different. After all, I have no idea where the exit actually is, so I'd be wandering around the dungeon anyway.

First off, I know way too little about this dungeon. I may have been born and raised in here, but I don't even know its name. I don't know how big it is, don't know the difficulty level, and don't even have a vague idea of its layout. There are way too many things I don't know.

Hm? Weren't there other things I was complaining I didn't know about...? Ah! Right, right, back when I picked up Appraisal! I couldn't raise Appraisal's level any further while I was still in my home, but now that I'm outside I might be able to! If I can get its level up, it might start being a little more useful, so I'm going to start appraising everything I come across. Let's begin!

Labyrinth Wall
Labyrinth Wall
Labyrinth Ceiling

Ah, as useless as ever. Hmm, well, if I keep this up and appraise everything I come across, I should be accumulating proficiency points. Ugh, having all of this information pouring into my brain is a pretty bad feeling, though. I'm just going to have to suffer until I get used to it, huh...

Back when I appraised that huge crowd of monsters, did I get hit by this same kind of bad feeling? Hmm, I don't think so... Maybe the raw shock of seeing so many monsters overwhelmed the weird feelings that Appraisal caused. Well, whatever. For now, I'll be wandering around the dungeon and appraising everything I can see.

17 Underhanded tactics in a face-to-face battle

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 2)], has been raised to level 3.”

Aha, that leveled up pretty quickly! Not very much time has passed since I started spamming Appraisal everywhere. This got way easier once I stopped being such a shut-in... Man, I've got some serious mixed feelings about this.

Well, regardless, it leveled! This is the best thing I could have hoped for. Now then, now then, what shall level three reveal? I immediately try to appraise myself.

Small Lesser Taratekt — LV 5 — (no name)

It's showing my level! Yaaaay... ..hahhh. Well, a plus is a plus, but... at what point is this skill going to actually be useful?

Mmm. Really, I have no idea how strong my species is supposed to be. Compared to everything else in this dungeon, how strong is a Small Lesser Taratekt?

As soon as I finished that thought, new information popped into my brain.

Small Lesser Taratekt: A Taratekt hatchling of an inferior breed.

What... was that? Did... did I just appraise the name of my species, which I got from Appraisal? Did I just double-appraise?! Oooh. Did I just discover a really important little trick to this skill? Let's test it, let's test it! I activate Appraisal once again.

Taratekt: A species of spider-like monster.

It worked! This is amazing! If Appraisal spits out some new word that I don't know yet, I can appraise it! Ahaa!! Sure, the explanation is pretty short, and it's definitely not giving me all of the information, but if I keep leveling this up, it's going to be crazy good, isn't it?! Just appraising one thing will let me pull up fact after fact! Ha-HA! Mister Appraisal, I'm sorry for saying you were useless! I will put my full efforts into leveling you up!

* * *

Now then, once my Appraisal-driven high wore off, I eventually became aware of two fairly important problems. Specifically: I'm hungry! And tired! That's basically it. It makes sense though; I fled my home at top speed and have been wandering the dungeon ever since, so it's only natural that I could use a snack and some sleep.

It's not like I can't deal with it for a little while longer, but eventually I will need to eat something and find someplace to sleep. Both of these tasks share the same stumbling block though: other monsters. If I want to eat, I need to find a monster, kill it, and eat it. Conversely, if I want to sleep, I need to find a place where monsters can't find me. This is a real catch-22. Mmm.

Ah! There might be a solution to both of these problems: when it's time for me to go to sleep, I'll put together a much simpler home and sleep in that. That will kill two birds with one stone: I'll be able to sleep in relative safety, and if a monster blunders in and gets stuck, I'll get breakfast for free.

It's just that... a little while ago, I said that I wanted to do as much hunting for my food as I could manage. Building a simple home to sleep in is basically mandatory, but while I'm awake I really should try to find a battle. Ultimately, my temporary home shouldn't be for the purposes of hunting. It should pretty much just be a safe place to get some sleep. Ah, well, if something gets caught in my web, I'm not going to refuse to eat it, haha.

Until then, let's keep wandering around the dungeon in search of a monster!

* * *

Found one!

Elro Frog — LV 3

It seems that I'm destined to find nothing but frogs: at the end of the hallway I've been sneaking through, I can see yet another one of the things. It's got its back turned to me, at the moment, and it doesn't look like it's noticed me yet. Could I maybe kill it with a sneak attack?

Of course, as soon as I think that, it spots me. Tch.

Hisssssss!

I start off with intimidation.

Ptoo!

Wha-!? Hey, you, don't just suddenly shoot your acid at me! I was barely able to dodge that!

Ptoo! Ptoo! Ptoo!

Don't keep shooting!! Ahh, aaah, ooof! I can't dodge all of these! Ow! Oww! I've got some resistance now, so this doesn't hurt nearly as much as it did the first time, but this! Still! Hurtsss! You jerk, how was I supposed to know you were this aggressive when you weren't stuck in a web?!

Ptoo! Ptoo! Ptoo!

Wait, wait! Gaaah! Another one got through to me! This is bad! The way things are going, this is going to be extremely one-sided! I've got only one option: suicide rush!!

Ptoo! Ptoo! Ptoo!

Hah, as if you can hit me again with the same attack! I've seen through your moves: your limit is three shots at a time! Don't take me too lightly, frog! I possess the analytic eye of a true gamer, and was once compared to the great Kartikeya! I dodge the poison spit as I rush in, then swing my claws down at the frog!

Grr, as I expected, it manages to dodge, but as it jumps out of the way it lashes out at me with its tongue!

Splat!

OWW! The tongue strikes me with crushing force. And, of course! It's covered in acid too! Not only was this a heavy blow, I'm feeling a sizzling pain! Ohhhh, this is a serious wound. If I had a health bar, it would be flashing bright red right now. If I take one more hit like that, I'm done for.

Heh, it's not like that's going to happen, though.

I've already won.

After all, before the frog jumped away, I'd laced the surroundings with my webs.

It's quite simple, really. As I was dodging the acid spit attacks, I was trailing threads out onto the ground behind me. Usually, if I'm not careful, I wind up unconsciously dropping thread onto the ground behind me as I walk. This time, though, I made use of it. I made the silk that I was spewing out very sticky, and forced the frog to jump onto it. My claw attack was specifically aimed to force it to dodge towards my trap. I didn't expect it to counter-attack in midair, though.

The frog lands and immediately gets stuck. Mercilessly, I wrap it up tightly with more and more thread, until there was only one thing left to do.

Chomp!

I have just won (albeit by a very slim margin) my first actual fight.

18 Recovering your HP at inns only happens in games

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Acid Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

My skill leveled. With this, it'll be a little bit easier to take down the next frog I come across. To be quite honest, if I didn't already have resistance, I think I would have gone over my maximum HP.

That was close! My body is practically in tatters. I got hit by that frog's spit twice and his tongue once, and just like that I'm on the brink of death. That tongue attack, though. Way too dangerous. A good chunk of my abdomen was straight-up caved in by the impact, and the sheer force of it rendered a few of my legs useless.

It's not like I walked into this unprepared or anything. I already knew that a straight-up fight against another monster was going to be way less likely to work than luring them into my webs. Even still, somewhere, in a hopelessly naive corner of my heart, I had thought that I'd be able to win it anyway. I'm way too exhausted, now.

Well, I don't think I'm going to be able to get very far with my body in this state. I should build a very basic home here, and focus on letting my wounds heal.

I leave the slain frog where it is, and start to weave my webs. Ow. Just moving around causes pain to stab through my body.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Pain Resistance (LV 1)].”

Oh? A new skill? Ahh, it feels like the pain is lessening just a little bit. It's still extremely painful, though. This is a pretty useful skill, though, you know? If I somehow manage to keep on living, even in this state, I'll keep getting proficiency. Small favors, huh.

Hoooof. At any rate, my basic home's done. Now I can finally rest. If I were any other kind of monster, I'd be wiped out if something happened to come along.

Ahhhh, well, I've still got my hard-won prey here to eat. Let's dig in.

I just barely scraped through my first real fight. Eh? What about that fight with my brother? I can't really call that a fight, you know. Doesn't count. Getting some real combat experience has made one thing pretty freaking obvious, though.

I'm WEEEEEEAK!

Yeah. It's not just that I as an individual am weak, but I think the entire species of Small Lesser Taratekts are weak. Well, we are an inferior breed, after all. Our attacks are weak, and our defenses fragile. Our one good quality seems to be our speed, but even that isn't good enough for me to be able to dodge all of that frog's saliva attacks. Looks like my base stats aren't even close to a low-level frog's.

I hadn't really had any problems killing enemies until now, thanks to my spiderweb traps. This straight-up fight, though, was a mess. I'm really starting to understand just how much I was using my home as a crutch.

Even so, one thing is very clear. Frontal assaults are impossible. If I have to fight head-on, everything hinges on my ability to snare my foe with my silk. My only other real option is trying to get in close and bite them

with my poison fangs, but my low stats make that impossible. I'd be cut down before I could get in a single attack.

With my speed, I can dance around my foe and strike when they slip up. I could also lay traps as I dodge and bait them into it, like I did just now. These will be the foundation of my strategy. Ooh, if I have enough forewarning, I could set traps in advance and lure them in.

Now that I think about it, I'm not at all suited to go against these frogs. With all of those ranged attacks, they're like a machine gun emplacement. There's no real need for them to move, so they're not going to jump into a trap of their own accord. Ugh, it really sucks not having a long-ranged attack. I could theoretically throw my threads at them, but the range is short and, worse, it might make them more mindful of my threads. I'll just keep that one in reserve. I should really come up with a good countermeasure for long-ranged attacks before I have to face them again.

Haaagh. I've got way too many problems. I've come face to face with my weaknesses... my enormous pile of weaknesses. Well, I can't really give up here, now, can I. If I just wanted to live, I could build a new home and hide there. But that won't do at all. I've decided that I will live proudly! I'm not going to take the easy way out like that.

But, for now, I should take it easy. How long will it take for these injuries to heal? ...Rather, are they even going to heal on their own? Maaaan, I wish I actually was a game character. Then I could heal all of my injuries with one night's rest.

Regardless, time to sleep. Today was exhausting, and I need to get plenty of rest if I want to have any chance of getting better. So, with that, good night.

* * *

Zzzzz. Hmmm? Aaahhhhhhh, I slept well! ...I say that, but it really feels less like I slept and more like I just passed out. Ergh, everything's still sore. I guess injuries this severe aren't going to heal themselves overnight.

Yaaaaaw— OWOWOWOW! I tried to stretch as I usually do, but moving my legs sent spears of pain running through them. Uuugh, my middle two right legs have it the worst. If I'm not careful, are they going to break off? Man, I'm really starting to get worried about my prospects for recovery.

Tap, tap.

Hm? My webs are vibrating... wait. Whoa! Even this basic web managed to catch something overnight! Man, the vibrations along my web usually wake me up as soon as something gets caught, but it looks like I was out absolutely cold. Maybe it's because of how beat up I am.

Elro Basilisk — LV 4

Whoa, if it isn't the petrifying lizard. Looks like I've caught yet another dangerous creature. What should I do... That thing has a petrifying gaze, so even though I've got it immobilized, it can still turn me to stone if our eyes meet. With such awful injuries, wouldn't petrification be extra-awful? ...Well, it's not like I'm going to set my all-important prey free.

Blink.

Ah, shoot, it opened its eyes! Nnngh! The ends of my legs are turning to stone! Aaaagh, fine! If it's come to this, I have no choice!

Chomp!

Thanks to Petrification Resistance, the rate of petrification is slow, but losing my one good foreleg is extremely bad. If I can't stop it before that happens, walking is going to be next to impossible. Please, I beg of you, die! While my leg can still move!

Slump.

As if in response to my prayers, strength leaves the basilisk's body while my leg is only half-fossilized. Ummmmf, walking on this isn't going to be impossible, but damn, it's going to be tough.

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 5 to level 6.”

Oh? Ohhh?! What godly timing!!

“Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Fang (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5 and your skill [Petrification Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Okay, okay! Two skills leveled up, which is great. But that's not why I'm happy...!

The skin starts to peel off my body. I'm molting. Thanks to this miraculous level-up, I'm literally shedding my injuries away! Even the huge dent in my abdomen that I was worried about has been completely fixed! Ya-HAAA! Basilisk, thank you! Thank you! Now, time to eat!

Even if I can't just sleep at an inn to get my hit points back, leveling up is almost as good.

19 If I don't get hit, there's no problem!

Ahh, it feels good to be back up to full. Oh man, I had completely forgotten that leveling up comes with a full heal attached.

Well, I don't think I'll be able to rely on levelups all the time. I just leveled, so it's probably going to be a while before I do so again. If I let myself get as injured as I just did every time I fight, it's pretty obvious that my wounds are just going to keep piling up. Hmm, if I hide away in a simple home like this every time I get wounded, maybe...

Yeah, no, that's not happening. That would just be reverting back to old habits.

...I say that, but I really need to figure out how I'm solving this problem. I just leveled up, but it's not like I suddenly got way stronger. I'm fully aware of my own weaknesses as a fighter, so I really think that I can find a way to win if I just put my mind to it. Suicidally diving straight into combat without a plan would be like diving straight into the Sanzu River¹⁰. ...Hm, now that I think about it, I died, and was reincarnated, but I don't recall crossing that river...

Well, in the end, do I have any other options? Ideally, I'd like to never take get wounded ever, but I am, alas, not afforded that luxury. Not only that, but I can't guarantee that I'm even going to win my next battle!

That frog fight was one bad move away from being extremely awful. What would I have done if the frog hadn't jumped into my web? I really don't want to think about it. It's hard enough to just barely survive a life-or-death struggle like that, let alone trying to do so without taking any damage at all. That's a hurdle I don't think I'd be able to clear.

Hmm, well, wait. That might not be a good line of thinking. Isn't getting hit extremely dangerous? I don't think my paper-thin defenses are going to be able to stand up to anything in a real fight. Yeah, this is seriously bad.

Compared to all the other monsters I've encountered so far, these frogs don't seem to even be particularly dangerous.

Yeah, I'm well aware that they are extremely dangerous to me; I fought one just now! If you just look at them, though, they don't look dangerous at all. If you ignored all of the bright "hey I'm poisonous don't eat me" markings, these things wouldn't be even the slightest bit threatening. Heck, if it didn't have the poison going for it, there's a ton of things out there that could just straight-up crush it through raw, superior strength. Yet, with one single hit from that tongue, I was brought to the brink of death.

If I ran into anything stronger, would I be able to take any of their attacks without dying at all?

No way. If I got hit by anything that strong, I'd be lucky if an injury is all I got.

What should I do? I don't have a single countermeasure. My defenses are all but useless! I should absolutely be working under the assumption that I am going to die if I get hit at all. So, shouldn't I just dodge everything that comes at me? It's so simple! Ah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Just like one of my impossible games!

In my previous life, my dodging skills in video games were straight-up godly. I only got to that point, though, because of the many, many hours of practice I put in. Let me be perfectly clear, though: I learned through failure. I died a ton before I finally figured out what I was doing wrong. I would charge in and survive as

¹⁰ The reference here is a Japanese Buddhist one, to the mythical River of Three Crossings (Sanzu-no-kawa). It's very similar to the River Styx: it is an extremely dangerous river that the dead must cross to enter the afterlife.

long as I could, just so that I could memorize a little more of the enemy's attack patterns. Once I had eventually gotten it down, though, then I could pull off my dodge-focused gimmick character with my eyes closed. Conversely, though: if it's an enemy I hadn't seen before, I had to start back at square one.

You really could compare the way I am now to my MMO playstyle. Just like back then, I've effectively got almost all of my stat points dumped into speed, a few into damage, and the rest left at their starting values. With paper-thin defenses and no way to deal with a threat at range, it really isn't a very practical way to build a non-gimmick character. Now, of course, I have to put up with this ridiculously disadvantageous build in real life.

First off, there's tons of ways that reality doesn't quite match up with a game. Let's take moving, for instance. In a game, all I needed to do was move my fingers a little bit to push a button, but in reality I have to move my entire body! My field of view is also way more constrained in reality than what I could see on my monitor. Most importantly, though: unlike in a game, I'm constantly terrified that a fight might end in my painful death.

Hm? It doesn't seem like I've been terrified, you say? Don't be ridicul... oh, hm, have I really not...? Hmmm? Let's, uh, let's forget about that last bit.

Yeah. In any event, this reality is very different than a game. I'm not going to be able to play the same kind of dodge gimmick character, since there's no way I'm going to be able to die over and over to make it work. Of course, I say there's no way I can make it work, but, really, I don't have any other ideas.

Ummf. Really, I have too few cards in my hand of skills. I've got Spider Silk, which is very versatile, but Poison Fang has basically just one way to use it. Appraisal... well, I continue to hold out hope that Appraisal will be useful once I get its level up! My Resistances are certainly useful, but that's mostly because my basic defenses are so weak. All that's left are the two skills I don't have any idea how to use: Dark Magic and Taboo.

The "Magic" part of Dark Magic brings to mind images of long-ranged spell attacks, but I have no idea how to use it. Aaaagh, I seriously need a tutorial! Seriously, if you're going to give me a skill, at least tell me how to use it! In a lot of fantasy settings, isn't just focusing on a spell enough to cast it? Man, it would be great if it were that easy. Ahhhhhh... ha. Well, it's not like complaining is going to make an explanation appear.

* * *

I peek out from behind a crag.

Small Rock Turtle — LV 2

Yeah. It's a turtle with a rock on its back. It's certainly quite large, but I don't think it's any much larger than a Galapagos tortoise. Really, compared to the other things I've seen so far, this really doesn't make a strong impression. Oh, wait, didn't its name say "Small"? Is this a... baby?

Small Rock Turtle: *The juvenile form of a Rock Turtle.*

Ah, is that that the case? I see! This is a child, you say? I definitely do not want to meet its mother.

Well, then, shall we get started? It doesn't seem like my opponent's noticed me just yet... so! Let's get right in with a sneak attack!

I leap out from behind my crag and charge in at full speed. I leap onto the turtle's rocky shell, and stick it with my silk!

Nwhooa! It threw me off! My threads still managed to get attached quite firmly, though. The turtle's stuck in plac— aaaaAAAAAAH!

The turtle snapped my threads and is charging straight at me!

Wha?! Retreat! Retreat! I jump to the side right before it hits.

Crash!!

The turtle charges forward until it hits the wall with a spectacular impact. Whoooooah. If I had gotten hit by that, I'd have gotten pancaked, right? Really, this is the first time I've seen a foe that can tear through my webs. This is bad, right?!

The turtle spins around to face me. Another charge! I dodge it! *Crash!* Another! I dodge! *Crash!!* Another!! Agh! That's enough!!

As I dodge the latest charge, I leave a thread behind to catch the turtle's leg. It trips and falls, but the momentum from its charge sends it tumbling. It lands on its back! Like this, you're going to have a hard time getting back up, aren't you, turtle? Heh, as if I would even let you try.

Chomp!

Sure, if I had gotten hit, I'd have died... but if I don't get hit, there's no problem!

20 I'm a spider, I'm right behind ya~!

Beating that turtle was tough! Even after I managed to flip it over, I tried to bite it to death, but that jerk retreated into its shell! I almost got my fangs pinched off when it sucked its head in. Of course, with my pathetic strength, I had no way to yank it back out, so I had to kind of just let poison dribble from my fangs into the head hole. That certainly got its attention! It shot its head back out of its shell, thrashing wildly, and I sunk my fangs into its helpless neck.

Then, I got to see what turtle tastes like. It was the first time ever since I was reborn that I'd gotten to taste meat that wasn't poisonous! It was chewy, and didn't taste very good.

Umf. I didn't get hurt this time! I was able to dodge every single one of my opponent's attacks. Of course, that turtle just kept charging me over and over like an idiot, and it's not like it was very fast at all, so I had all the time in the world to get out of the way. It's not like I'm some grand master at evasion, I just faced an opponent that was perfect for me.

Hmmmm. Although, I kind of feel like I'm a definitely faster than I was before. I know that all of my stats go up when I level, but I really don't feel much of an effect on most of them. My speed, though, has definitely and notably increased. Compared to when I was fighting the frog, I'm way faster. Looks like us Taratekts are extremely specialized in speed! Nevertheless, fighting purely via evasion is impossible.

Yeah! My speed and my threads are my greatest weapons. With these two, there's one strategy that's exactly tailored to me: sneak attacks!

Hm? That's cowardly? Cowardice means jack shit in a life-or-death fight! Think of this like a preemptive strike. That's not cowardice at all! Well, a preemptive strike does tend to decide the course of a battle.

What? I'm not going to get any useful combat experience? This is most certainly combat! You upon your lofty throne could not possibly understand it!

Well, I say that I'm going to try sneak attacks, but there's only like a fifty-fifty chance I can actually pull it off, right? We're in a danger zone! The other monsters aren't just blithely wandering through, they're going to be on the lookout for danger. If I can actually pull off a sneak attack, I stand to gain a lot... probably. If it fails, though, then I'm going to have to make a lot of really snappy decisions based on how the situation unfolds.

The big problem is any other monsters that could rip off my threads like the turtle did. Seriously, the threads I had thought were impervious to all but flame can be torn off? My Spider Silk skill is level six. It's the highest skill I have! Tearing through my silk basically equals defeating me. I'm really glad that turtle was such a good match with the rest of my abilities. Other monsters, though. Just the thought of other silk-ripping monsters is terrible. Granted, I may have been over-relying on my threads a little bit. I'm going to keep this idea at the edge of my thoughts from now on.

* * *

After that, I wandered through the labyrinth for a bit, but didn't find any other monsters. I'm getting sleepy, so I'm calling it for today. Time to retire to my simple home.

* * *

Ah, the breaking of the dawn! ... Well, uh, I don't actually know if it's morning or not, but, uh, I'm awake now. Resuming my explorations. Seriously, though, this dungeon really is extremely huge. I've been wandering around ever since I got myself lost in this labyrinthine section, and there's no sign of escape.

Whenever I hit an intersection, I always take the rightmost fork. I remember hearing that keeping your right hand on the dungeon's wall is a great way to keep yourself from getting lost. It's easier to retrace your steps if you're following a rule, anyway. Plus, I can always follow the trail of silk that I keep unconsciously leaving behind me as I walk.

I continue to steadily step through these labyrinthine corridors, but there's no sign of the exit. I keep Appraisal running in the background, but all it's saying is the usual: labyrinth wall and labyrinth floor. I don't really have any accurate way to measure my distance, but if I were to low-ball an estimate, I'd say I've walked several dozen kilometers so far. Ugh, now that I'm thinking about it, that really is seriously far! If I were still a human, walking this kind of distance would just straight-up kill me.

Ah, here comes today's first prey. Oooh, and it's a kind I've never seen before! It looks kind of like a centipede, with its many rustling legs. First off: Appraisal.

Elro Ferekt — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Hm? Failed? Ahhh, the level is missing! Huh, looks like Appraisal can fail! It's my first time seeing this happen. Well, it's not like it failing gave me any less information than what I usually get, so it doesn't really matter for now.

Ah, wait, hold on, hold on. Could it maybe have failed because our levels are too different? If that's the case, this centipede would have to be way stronger than me. Hmmm? I'm not really getting that kind of feeling off of it, though... maybe level differences don't have any effect on Appraisal at all? That's all well and good, but if it's really just a case where it's hiding its true skill...?

...Man, even if I keep waffling, there isn't really any excuse. Being a woman is all about courage, right? Are we going to do this?!

Without making a noise, I quietly creep behind my foe. _Slide, slide, slide. _Greetings! Die!

* * *

My sneak attack was a complete success. It was such a complete success that it was almost an anticlimax. All of that worrying I had been doing about the centipede being crazy tough was all in my head. It wasn't able to rip apart my webs like the turtle could, so I was able to tie it up without any problems. Then I bit it with my poison fangs until it stopped moving.

You'd think you know how disgusting centipedes would taste just from looking at them, but this is seriously gross. On top of that, it's got some weird poison, so after eating it I feel kind of weird. My entire body feels kind of... stiff.

Argh! Ever since I was reborn as a spider, I haven't gotten to eat a single delicious thing! This is seriously a first-world problem, but I want tastier food. Aaaaah, someone, anyone, even a cup noodle will do!

S2 The Fourth Prince

I feel warm, almost like I'm submerged in pleasant water. I drift, wrapped in this warm embrace, and feel at peace. After a while, this comes to an end, and I'm pushed through a tiny hole into the outside world. I feel uneasy about being pushed out of that warm, safe place, but once I'm out, the world seems to open up before me.

This is my oldest memory.

* * *

"Your Highness, please come down from there! You'll catch a cold."

As I sit at the window, gazing outside, a maid calls out to me. Just as she says, it is quite cold out there. Everything outside is covered in a thick blanket of snow. Watching the snow fall is quite a pleasant way to pass the time, but it seems like I've been sitting here for quite some time. Recently, I seem to lose track of time easily when I'm concentrating.

"Alright, there, up we go!"

The maid *picks me up* and sets me down on the bed. The bed is huge, almost too big for just one person, but there's already another person here: a very young baby, sleeping pleasantly and soundly. This crib seems to have been custom-made so the two of us could sleep comfortably next to each other.

By now, it should be quite obvious: I am a baby.

It may seem strange for a baby to be able to think so clearly, but I possess all of the faculties that I had in my previous life. I had been a perfectly ordinary, unassuming high school student, but something happened and before I knew it I was suddenly a baby.

It looks like this is reincarnation: the thing where a dead person is reborn as another. This, of course, means that my previous life is over. The last thing I remember was sitting in Japanese Literature. I watched a hole open up in the empty air of the classroom, and then my memories abruptly cut off.

Holes in spacetime do not generally tend to appear on Earth. That's probably what killed me. Then, for some reason, I was reincarnated with my memories from my previous life.

If you were to ask me if I had any regrets, I really couldn't say that I didn't. Far from it, really. I was still in the height of my youth. I wanted to hang out some more with my friends, and I never got the chance to try dating a girl my age. My parents, my grandparents, I died before any of them. I've left them with such a heavy burden. I get depressed whenever I think about how I'm never going to see them again.

I'm worried about what happened to everyone else at school after I died. I remember a huge explosion when that crack opened up in the air. It certainly killed me, but what about everyone else? Kyouya and Kanata... my neighbor Hasebe... did everyone die along with me? If I think about it, that's really scary. That morning, I greeted them like it was no big deal, but now I'll never be able to see them again.

* * *

Ever since I was reincarnated, I've been fighting my way through the uneasiness that has been gripping me. Of course I would be uneasy: I was suddenly reborn as a baby, with no knowledge of how I had gotten here. Furthermore, I wasn't reborn in Japan. I wasn't even reborn on Earth. This is another world entirely.

This took me a little while to figure out. I didn't understand anything they were saying, and I haven't been outside this nursery very much, so there's many things that it's taken me a while to learn. At first, I thought that I was in some European country. Then, however, I saw someone use magic, and it was immediately obvious that I had thought wrong.

This world has magic. The first time I saw it was when a high-ranking priest came to bestow a blessing on me. My body was wrapped in a sparkling light, and an overflowing strength welled up within me. You might think that it was a trick, or my imagination, but this was of a level that couldn't be covered by such a trivial explanation. It would be way too hard to fake what I felt then.

I was excited about the existence of magic as soon as I found out about it. Even still, after the initial excitement faded, I was back to being uneasy. Am I going to be able to make it in a world of magic? I was an extremely ordinary guy in my previous life. Back in Japan, this didn't cause me any problems, but this world might not tolerate such an ordinary person. Am I going to be able to live up to what's expected of me? I don't know, and it's making me nervous.

I desperately set to learning the local language. Not being able to understand anyone around me was even worse than I had ever imagined. I had no idea what anyone was saying. I never thought I could ever feel so helpless and alone. I felt so isolated, like I was the only person in the world.

The uneasiness from being reborn into another world, from not knowing the language, from not knowing if I'd be able to survive, all of these compounding fears weighed heavily on me. I was saved, though, by the baby girl peacefully sleeping next to me. My sister, born of a different mother. She has no worries at all, sleeping peacefully as if nothing in the world could possibly go wrong. Well, it's only natural for a baby. Babies can't do anything without help, and must rely on others to take care of them. A real baby is such a fragile existence. The only reason why I'm so worried is because of all of the memories I've brought with me from my previous life.

That's when I realized. I have all of this experience from before, so I should undoubtedly be stronger, mentally, than my sister. Yet why was she sleeping so peacefully, when I was so burdened by worry? I'm this kid's big brother, and an older brother shouldn't make his little sister worry. I need to be an awesome big brother that she can look up to.

I may have just been putting on a brave face for my sister, but I found myself worrying less and less. My troubles haven't all gone away, but now I have something to hold on to: I want to protect my helpless little sister.

I've focused on learning the language and, little by little, have come to understand what people are saying around me. I wanted to be able to move around as soon as I could, so I flailed my little baby limbs around to gain strength. Thanks to that, I learned to crawl far earlier than most babies. I kept my motivation up by remembering that I was going to be the kind of older brother that my sister was going to want to brag about.

Thus begins the story of the fourth prince of the Analeicht Kingdom, Slaine Zagan Analeicht.

21 HP/MP/SP

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

Oh, finally! Appraisal’s level went up! The information barrage hasn’t really been making me woozy lately, so this is great timing. Now, what will you show me this time, Appraisal? > Small Lesser Taratekt — LV 6 — (no name)

Huh? There’s... no change? No, wait, underneath my species name, there’s a few horizontal colored lines. What are these...?

HP Gauge

I unintentionally Appraised the green line on top, so now it’s quite obvious what it represents. “HP” is an abstraction that show up in so many video games, after all. It stands for “hit points”, but what’s important is that it’s a representation of my physical health. When I take damage, they’re depleted, and when I run out, well, game over. This new meter has appeared in my Appraisal results!

This is a pleasant surprise! Until now, I’ve had to estimate how much damage I’d taken in my head, and didn’t really have any other good way to check. Now, I’ve got an health bar, so I can tell at a glance what my condition is like!

Right now, my health bar is just about full. It looks like it might be a little bit decreased: at the very right of the bar, there’s a short little black section. Ummmm... I really would like to figure out how to get actual numbers out of this, but even still, this is a real luxury.

Now, under my health bar are three more bars. Let’s start by checking out this blue one, immediately below my HP.

MP Gauge

Ah, that’s to be expected. If there’s HP, there’s got to be MP. This must be showing how much magic power I have available! Of course, since I have no idea how to cast any of my magic, it’s not like I really care... It probably only goes down when you cast a spell, and since I have no spells to cast, this is probably never going to drop.

The real puzzle is the identity of these last two bars. One’s yellow and the other’s red, and they’re arranged so closely together that they almost look like one bar. I have no clue what these could possibly represent! Welp... Appraise.

SP Gauge

Hm? SP? Skill Points? Hmmm? Why would I need a bar for those? Wait, I’m jumping to conclusions again. This probably isn’t for skill points. SP is an abbreviation, but I have no good ideas of what it could stand for. Well, let’s go ahead and Appraise “SP”.

SP: Stamina points.

Oh? Aaaah! It really isn’t skill points, but a different word with the same first letter! That’s way too confusing.

Hoofh. Even so, “stamina”, huh. Is this the physical equivalent of my mana bar? Is it going to go down when I exercise? Hmmm? Wait, why are there two meters for it, and why is the yellow bar on top full up while the

red one on bottom already has a third of it missing? What's the difference? Let's try running "stamina points" through Appraisal.

***Stamina points:** points that are consumed through exercise.*

Ah, yep. I still don't get it. Ohh, well, if I keep an eye on it, I'll be able to figure it out eventually, right? If I can, I should try to figure out how to keep this Appraisal notification open so that I can always see my health bar. Maybe I can set Appraisal to continuously cast on myself... like... this? Ah, yeah! Not bad, if I do say so myself. Now I can always look to see how much health I have, unless I take it down voluntarily. This is seriously convenient!

Although... it really is convenient to see my own meters... but isn't seeing my enemy's HP and MP going to give me a ridiculous advantage? I can look at its health to figure out how many more hits it's got left in it, and if it's a magic user I can keep an eye on its MP so that I can figure out when it's my turn to strike. It's not like I've found any magic-specialized monsters so far, though. Regardless, being able to know even a tiny bit of the opponent's stats is a huge advantage in combat! Ah, Appraisal, how could I have doubted how god-tier OP you were? Heheheh. I saw this coming! I deliberately picked up such a useless skill because I knew it was going to grow into something wonderful. Of course I knew it was going to be useless from the start! You can't prove otherwise!

Well now, eyes forward, marching, marching. Oh! Found a monster.

Elro Ferekt — LV 3 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

I would like to retract my previous statement. This is useless after all! How did I make such a serious mistake...? Ugh, I'm such an idiot for getting my hopes up.

Regardless, here's another centipede. What to do? Hmm. A sneak attack might not really work. It hasn't spotted me yet, but it's facing this way, so I'm not going to be able to get behind it.

Wait, I just had a brilliant idea!

I stealthily creep up the wall and make my way towards the ceiling. Having a spider's body sure is convenient sometimes! Oop, hanging upside down on a ceiling is actually pretty tricky. It's not that bad, though, if I brace myself well I'm in no danger of falling.

Like this, I slowly creep along the ceiling. You can do it, legs! ...Hm? Oh, my stamina bar is going down! No time for that now, though, I have a plan to concentrate on.

I arrive over the unsuspecting centipede. All right! I'm so close, yet he doesn't see me. I stick a thread to the ceiling, and slowly descend until I'm right behind him.

Then I leap! The centipede tenses up in fear, but it's far too late! I spin it around and around, rolling it up in my silk, and then I go in for the kill! *Chomp!* Ahahaha! How do you like my new strategy, codenamed "look out, I'm right above you"? I'd say it's a pretty overwhelming success!

Well, once again, time to eat.

Umf. As I eat, I go back to contemplating my stamina bar. While I was clinging to the ceiling, the yellow bar was steadily decreasing. When I braced myself, the rate of change went down a little bit. Now, though, it's completely back up to full. Hm?

"Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Paralysis Resistance (LV 1)]."

Oh... oh!! Centipede, you were hiding a paralysis attack from me?! Man, if my sneak attacks hadn't worked, these fights would have been way tougher. I'm going to have to be more careful next time.

Hm? Hmmmm? Doesn't it look like the lower red part of my stamina bar is increasing? I remember it being about a third of the way empty, but it's slowly been creeping back up. It's only a quarter empty, now. Why, I wonder? Why would my stamina start increasing...?

...Oh, yeah, I ate something. Aha! That's it! I see, I see! I think I understand a little bit.

To summarize, it looks like the red bottom bar represents how much overall energy I can muster in the long term. That means the yellow one on top represents my short-term stamina?

To test it out, I took off running at full speed, causing the yellow bar to start draining very quickly. It soon ran out completely, perfectly coinciding with me exhausting my last bit of strength.

Wheeze, wheeze.

Ugh, going for a run immediately after eating, I must be some kind of idiot. My stomach really hurts. Seriously.

This clinches it, though. The yellow bar is my instantaneous energy reserves. If that runs out, I'll be left here trying to catch my breath. It seems to recover just as quickly as it's depleted, though. After I got my breathing under control, it started filling right back up.

So, the red bar on the bottom must be my overall endurance. After all that running, it went down just a little bit. Man, I don't know what would happen if my endurance meter hit zero, but it can't be good. Maybe I won't be able to move at all, and that's one of the least punishing things that come to mind. It looks like it's recovered via eating, but I'm definitely going to need to keep an eye on this.

22 The Spider Silk Experiments

My explorations of this labyrinth are going fairly well. In fact, everything's going so well that I'd be laughing out loud if I had lungs. This part of the labyrinth seems to be the territory of the centipedes, so there's a lot of them here. They've been super accommodating in helping me gather XP! Their reaction times are extremely slow, so I've had no problems at all catching them with my sneak attacks. Whether it's from behind or above, my victory is almost always assured. Thanks to that, defeating them is easy!

I've killed a ton of these so far, and my level has gone all the way up to seven. Unfortunately I didn't receive any level-up bonuses to my skills, but constantly eating this paralytic meat has brought my Paralysis Resistance up to 2. This place is great! I can farm up XP, and I can even work on leveling my ever-useful Paralysis Resistance. What an excellent hunting ground.

Of course, it hasn't been 100% perfectly easy. I'm still diligently trying to gain more practical combat experience, so I've been experimenting with variations on my sneak attack.

The biggest weakness of my threads is that I can only release it from my bottom. As such, if I want to stick any silk onto my opponents, I have to point my butt at them. I have to pose propped up on my two hind legs and stick my butt way out, or otherwise face directly away from my opponent. This is, of course, is a very vulnerable position to be in, so in order to compensate I've been either attaching my silk while I'm already on top of my enemy, or I bombard them with it while I jump overhead.

Even still, those are still pretty dangerous methods. Sure, if my threads hit, then my victory is basically set in stone. However, if I miss... there's a huge chance it will seriously backfire. If I'm on top of my opponent, dodging their counterattacks is extremely difficult; likewise, if I'm soaring through the air, I'm at serious risk of being shot down like my idiot brother did back then. It's not quite what you'd call a "high-risk, high-reward" strategy.

Well, once I'd acknowledged the problem, the next step was to come up with some new strategies to keep myself safe against enemies I can't get my threads attached. The solution is this, my new weapon: the portable web! Basically, I've got a tiny little web stretched between my forelegs. It gets rid of the vulnerable-pose problem, since I can easily hit with it while charging forward. Now that I no longer need to stick my butt out in that unbelievable stance to get my opponent stuck, this is going to be way easier.

Of course, there are drawbacks. While I've got one of these webs on standby, my forelegs are otherwise useless. Yeah, I've still got six more legs, but it's still pretty inconvenient. The other problem is that I have to make these well in advance. Well, luckily for me, I'm a pro at building nets, so it wouldn't be that bad.

This is quite a magnificent low-risk, high-reward tactic!

I tried a bunch of other things, but all of them ended in failure.

I wanted to come up with a strategy to protect me against the sneak attacks of others, so I dug up my old idea of an enemy-detecting thread. The basic idea is to have a whole bunch of invisibly-fine threads floating in the air. If they were to catch on something, like, say, an enemy, I'd feel the vibration and be able to react. This is a similar idea to how I had a bunch of fine threads strung up in and around my home, but, in practice... there's a few differences between stringing something up and letting it float around.

My unattended seeker-threads had the unfortunate tendency to bump into either themselves or the wall. Of course, this caused them to constantly vibrate, one after another, which wound up being a huge distraction. I could probably sort it out in my head if I were to concentrate hard enough, but then I wouldn't be paying attention to anything else, which is really putting the cart before the horse. For now, I have to put my plans for an enemy-seeking thread aside.

Next, I wanted to try making myself some silken armor to try to shore up my terrible defenses. The results, I have to say, were awful. It's not like I can't make any clothing, but wearing it is basically impossible. I'm a spider, you know? I don't have useable hands like I did when I was a human, and my body's got a really weird shape to it, so no matter how hard I tried I couldn't figure out how to get anything on.

How about just wrapping myself in thread, you ask? That's also no good. I can certainly get a bunch of thread wrapped around me, but unless I do it perfectly, it's probably just going to wind up getting tangled around me and restricting my movements. My speed is my greatest asset, you know? If I were to do it, I'd have to wrap myself up super carefully... which doesn't work for the same reasons that make it impossible to wear normal clothes in the first place.

Even still, if I somehow managed to get some sort of armor on, it's useless if it's not something I can take off easily. When I eat, for instance, my body tends to inflate. If I'm wearing any sort of restrictive clothing when I start swelling up like a ball, wouldn't that be extremely painful?

Things might be a little bit different if I could borrow someone's time to help me get in and out of my armor, but without human hands or even the ability to see most of my body, I'm going to have to abandon this idea.

Ummf. Now that I'm thinking about it, being a spider has its pluses and minuses. I can leap through the air and cling to the walls, but not having hands seriously puts a huge damper on my abilities. Human hands are superbly useful. I now understand this from the bottom of my heart.

Incidentally, all of this experimentation didn't get my Spider Silk skill level up at all. Yeah, as I thought, a high-level skill has much higher proficiency requirements for advancement. Well, it's not like I can really spend a bunch of time meaninglessly spewing out thread, like I was doing back in my home. Running around outside is way more dangerous than the safety of my home, so I want to make sure I'm in top form at all times. I could only really experiment as much as I did because there's plenty of food around here in the form of centipedes.

This round of experiments was fraught with failure, but quite a few valuable things. In the future, I'll keep an eye out for even more opportunities to try some new things out.

23 I got carried away! I'm sorry! Forgive me!

Today, like every other day, I'm hunting centipedes. Maaan. It's Centipede Heaven, here! They look pretty gross, but they're really pretty awesome prey if you don't look at them too closely. Well, my sensibilities really aren't so delicate. I think their rustly little legs are actually kind of charming. Centipedes are the best!

My Paralysis Resistance skill is up to level three, and I'm going to hit level eight soon, right? Seriously, thank you, little buddies.

Just now, I tried to see if I could take two of them on at once, and I did remarkably well, considering. The first one I did in with a sneak attack, but the second I had a pretty tense battle with. In a straight-up fight, centipedes seem to be remarkably quick! Hah, well, not as quick as me. It looks like their attacks are largely limited to biting. Their paralytic venom would probably do me in if I were to get bitten... but, y'know, if I don't get hit, there's no problem at all. As long as I'm wary of the bite, everything else is easy. I've finally found an entire race of beings weaker than me!

It looks it's not just sneak attacks that are effective against these guys. I can hit them straight-on too! MwahahaHA! I'm so STROOOONG! I almost can't stop laughing.

They're also super-easy to eat, which is awesome. They may look huge when they're still rustling around, but the actual volume of meat inside is surprisingly small. One of them is enough to sate my appetite in the short term, but is nowhere near enough to fill me up entirely. Thus, I've been eating every scrap of every centipede I've encountered, leaving nothing behind. Waste not, want not. I'm a pretty frugal person, so I well understand that waste is the greatest of sins. These centipedes are great, though, since I can eat the entire thing and not need to worry about wasting anything.

It's really quite nice of the centipedes, to be born solely for the purpose of filling my belly! Ehehehehhh. I've been living my life super-cautiously until now, so it really can't hurt me to have some fun once in a while?

* * *

Humming and exploring, humming and exploring~! Well, I don't really have any way to hum for real, so I was just humming in my head. ...Vocal cords aside, do I even have a nose to begin with? Ah, well, doesn't matter.

Oh? Looks like the path forks here. Neither of them look much like a dead end though.

It's a little weird. This labyrinth is enormous, and I haven't seen a single dead end! While I've been exploring the labyrinth, I haven't hit any parts of a path where I needed to think about turning around. It's great to know that I'm not going to run out of corridor if I'm being chased by something, but thinking about how huge this dungeon must be just makes me sigh.

What if this world, this entire world, is just one big underground dungeon? I don't think that's the case, but I've certainly not been able to find an exit, much less leave and take a look at the outside myself. It really could be true.

I'm sure that the outside world exists, but even so, there's a chance that my ineptitude could wind up making me live out my entire life in this dungeon. If that's the case, I'd really like to die of old age while searching for the exit, but it's way more likely that I'll end up dying prematurely. Hm, I was just thinking about old age, but I have no idea what my natural lifespan actually is. Just based solely on size, might I live only about as long as a large dog? At the very least, I'd like to live longer than I did in my previous life.

Well, let's put these useless thoughts aside.

The path forks at the top of a huge cliff. Before me, an enormous cavern yawns. Has my journey through these maze-like tunnels finally come to an end? I wonder what's next! I really hope it's not a super-dangerous zone like the one I was born in, with all of the cannibalism and the giant spiders and the huge crowds of monsters. It doesn't matter how long my lifespan is, it's not enough to deal with all of that.

Ah, anyhow, what should I do now? I quickly glance down into the pit.

Elro Ferekt — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Ferekt — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Ferekt — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Ferekt — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Ferekt — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Ferekt — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)* and so on, and so on.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

Grrk! My... head... HURTS! Information from Appraisal blasts into my brain like a punch to the face. Whoa, I almost passed out. That was bad, that was bad. If I overdo it with Appraisal, I'll get too much information for my brain to handle, leaving me with a monstrous headache. Well this is useful information to have, now isn't it! Fainting would have only been natural.

.....Hang on, I was too busy not passing out, what did Appraisal tell me?

I deliberately look over the edge of the cliff. Yeah, it's a cliff, but it really only looks like it's one meter deep. The cavern before me is pretty huge, but it really doesn't feel like a vast, empty space. After all, it's completely covered in centipedes.

Whaa?!

What what what what what what?!?! Centipedes! Centipedes!!!! All I see are centipeeeeeeeedes!!!! This is disgusting! This goes beyond just gross, this is straight-up disgusting.

Hmm? Centipedes, might I ask what you are looking at? Me? I can't imagine why you'd all be looking at...

I need to get out of here. I must become the wind! Quickly, from whence I came!

Rumblerrumblerrumblerrumblerrumble!!

Eeeeeeeek! They're chasing me! They're chasing me! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!! I got carried away!!! Forgive me! Seriously, please!! Forgive meee!

My yellow stamina meter is empty. Ugh, it hurts to keep going, but if I stop, I die!! I don't care if it hurts as bad as dying, I must! Keep! Going!! In place of my yellow meter, the red one starts to slowly decrease.

In the end, although it cost me about half of my red stamina bar, I escaped the army of centipedes.

Man, I seriously thought I was going to die.

24 Weak.

Haaaah. Centipedes are scary. Seriously, what just happened? Man, that swarming mass of violence struck fear into my heart. Ugh. I'm beat. My yellow stamina meter, which shows my short-term energy, ran out, but I kept running and running. My legs are trembling! I should really call it quits for today.

I turn around one more time, just to see if the centipede brigade has caught up to me. Good, all clear, all clear. I string up my threads, and put together another simple home. As soon as I feel like I'm safe within my webs, all of the strength leaves my body.

Ahh, well, that was pretty traumatic. They're pretty weak one-on-one, but if there's that many of them? Seriously dangerous. Plus, those things can paralyze me! If one of them managed to bite me just once, I'd fall prey to their paralytic venom. All that's left after that would be to drag my immobile body back to their nest and slowly devour me. Even just thinking about it is awful.

I really should have been asking myself why there were so many centipedes around here. I mean, not just that, but, why wasn't I wondering where the other monsters were? Centipedes are weak as hell. These guys make such good prey! Why didn't I think it was odd that there weren't any other predators feeding on these guys? Maybe they didn't want to eat centipedes because of the paralytic poison, but, seriously, this is a dungeon filled with poison-attribute monsters. That's a pretty flimsy excuse.

So, either all of the other monsters around here know to steer clear of the centipedes, or the centipedes used their numbers to sweep in and murder any intruders. My speed's at the level where I was just barely able to escape, but that might be way trickier for the other monsters. Getting bit while running away, and then getting set upon by uncountable centipedes? Way. Too. Scary. to think about.

Us weak monsters need to come up with ways to work around our weaknesses, if we want to survive. I, for instance, really suck in a straight-up fight, but I can kill things way stronger than me once I've got them trapped in my webs. It's because I'm so weak that I can't afford to slip up. I think I've learned my lesson, this time.

I've somehow been able to live pretty securely as of late, and, really, these centipedes are tasty. Thanks to all that, grinding up my level has been remarkably easy.

Oh, that reminds me! When I accidentally appraised the entire centipede brigade at once, Appraisal's level went up! Talk about a lucky strike, seriously. Well, first off, I should take a closer look at the Appraisal results that I'm constantly pulling up on myself. I didn't really have time to do that while I was being chased by that centipede swarm.

Small Lesser Taratekt — LV 7 — (no name) Statistics: Weak

Are you kidd... "Statistics: Weak"?! That's way too harsh! I mean, I know I'm weak, but still... could you maybe try being a little less blunt! Man, if Appraisal is calling me weak, then I guess that really does mean that I'm weak in the eyes of the world. Haaaaaah. I slump defeatedly.

Wait, no, wasn't I just thinking that I couldn't let myself get careless, even around weak enemies? I have my silk! Sure, I might be physically weak, but my silk is strong! Defeat isn't in my vocabulary, if I've got my silk. So, seriously, why are you calling me weak? I might be a bit biased, but I'm pretty strong if I can gain an advantage! Whether I lure them into a silken trap or sneak up on them from above, immobilizing my opponent and finishing it off with my poison fangs is painless. Yeah. I fight really dirty. It's interesting, though, to see just how quickly I go back to being weak once I'm confronted face-to-face.

Really, the problem is figuring out how to keep everyone playing on my terms. If I let my opponents set the pace of the fight, all of my advantages are worthless. Ah, well, it's not a big problem if I can manage to keep control of things every time, you know.

Well, I'm tired, I'm going to get some sleep.

* * *

I've woken up. I'm still weighed down by fatigue, but I've woken up nonetheless. What is this... sensation? I don't really know, but I've got a bad feeling about it.

I hurriedly get up and run over to start adding additional threads to my simple home. There, the source of my troubles is revealed.

Elro Baldarad — LV 9 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

It's a colossal snake, big enough around to swallow a person whole, and at least ten meters long. By looks alone, it's strong. Plus, it's level nine. This is the first time I've seen a monster that's higher level than me. Actually, this is the first time I've seen a monster that's this high-leveled at all! The highest so far has been level four, and in one jump that number's gone up to nine.

It's obviously higher up on the food chain than I am, and its level is higher too. I've got no chance at all if it comes to a fight. I'm seriously breaking out in a cold sweat.

I'm frozen like a deer in the headlights. Er, like a spider in the headlights.¹¹ My body is rigid with fear, but I somehow make myself move. I slowly back up, putting some distance between myself and the snake.

The snake doesn't just let that happen.

Paying no heed to my webs, it thrusts itself forward! It, of course, gets stuck, but it writhes around, tearing my webs from the walls! I turn around and start running as fast as I can. I slip through the gaps in my simple home to the outside, but in an instant the snake is right behind me, tearing at the webs I just passed through.

My instincts are screaming at me to flee. I don't think I will, though. I saw it. The snake is getting tangled in my webs. It may be able to break them down, but it can't get them off of it completely. Now, it's got the remnants of the first set of webs clinging to it, in addition to being caught in my second set.

I can do this! This fight is on my terms.

I leap onto the snake as it writhes. I immediately start biting at it, while simultaneously spewing more silk from my rear. I somehow pierce through its thick scales, and hit it with my Poison Fang!

The snake starts thrashing as the poison courses through its body. Even though I've bound it with so much silk, it's able to fling itself about with a ton of force! I'm flung against the walls and the ceiling over and over, but I pull through and keep fighting with raw grit and will!

My yellow stamina meter is draining, and my green health meter goes down every time I'm flung against the wall. My red stamina meter also seems to be decreasing with every thread I release. If that runs out, I probably won't be able to release any more threads. It's only a matter of time, then, before the snake will be able to tear itself free. I have to beat it before that happens.

¹¹ More idioms! The original phrase is something like "A frog caught in a snake's glare" (蛇に睨まれた蛙), which basically just means that the speaker is frozen, paralyzed in shock. Unfortunately we don't have an idiom in English that simultaneously mentions snakes and captures the - feel of a creature frozen in fear, so I had to go with "deer in the headlights" so that I could more accurately preserve the joke. ("I'm like a frog, no wait, a spider, caught in a snake's glare" would be more literal.)

I keep biting and spraying threads with reckless abandon. Gradually, gradually, the snake's struggles grow weak. I've long since exhausted my yellow meter, and my red meter is down to about ten percent, but the snake finally stops moving entirely.

Just because I'm weak, doesn't mean you can take me lightly!

25 Tasty, tasty snake.

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 7 to level 8. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Pain Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 8 to level 9. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Poison Fang (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6 and your skill [Night Vision (LV 9)] has been raised to level 10. Your [Night Vision] skill has reached its maximum level, and a new skill, [Visible Range Expansion (LV 1)] has been unlocked. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Whoa, that’s a huge amount of growth. Looks like beating a foe much stronger than you gives a ton of experience, no matter what world you’re in. In the blink of an eye, my level went up by two.

That snake was certainly quite a formidable opponent. If it had been a full-on fight, there’s not even a sliver of a chance that I would have won. A powerful body. A hide covered in extremely tough scales. Speed that might even eclipse mine, if the few times it lunged at me were any indication. To top it all off, venom. As a snake, there is no doubt that its bite carries a powerful venom.

Even after restraining it, I think my odds were still only about 50/50. Leveling up may have fully healed all of my wounds, but I had taken a tremendous amount of damage before then. My stamina is only just barely still positive. That was seriously dangerous.

But to go with that huge risk, the return was equally huge, you know! When I was tirelessly overhunting those centipedes, I felt like I was on a nice, steady path to eventually becoming level eight. I never thought that jumping all the way up to level nine in one go was even possible!

I’m definitely excited about leveling up, but the skill increases I got were also huge! Pain Resistance going up is nice on its own, but Poison Fang went up as well! It’s one of my biggest trump cards, second only to Spider Silk. As Poison Fang grows, so does my offensive capacity. Well, hm, it’s definitely worth remembering that Poison Fang is basically my only offensive options, so it would be really awful to face something with a high tolerance for poison.

Next up is probably the most interesting one from this level-up: Night Vision. Yeah. Now that it was brought up, it’s really not strange at all that I should have it. The light of the sun doesn’t, of course, reach this deep into the dungeon. In fact, there’s no light at all! Yet I can still see clearly in this inky blackness. I’m actually a little surprised that this is because of a skill, I had honestly thought that it was part of the whole spider package.

So, when Night Vision leveled up, my vision seemed to sharpen. What once was murky is now clear and bright. I can clearly and distinctly make out the scenery around me. Skills must max out at level ten. If that weren’t the case, then this could level up even more, and I have no idea how my night vision could possibly get any better. Ah, well, maybe it’s just Night Vision that has only ten levels.

So, when Night Vision leveled up to ten, as a bonus, I acquired the related skill “Visible Range Expansion” out of nowhere. That’s great and all, but I have no idea what it could possibly do! Judging by the name, I thought that it might increase the physical range of my vision, but it really doesn’t seem like that’s the case. Well, I guess I’ll throw this one onto the piles of skills I know nothing about but their name.

At times like these, I really wish I had the ability to appraise my skills. Unfortunately, the only valid targets for Appraisal are things that I can see, and I only know the skill names because the “Voice of Heaven” *said*

them out loud. If it's not a thing that's in front of me, I can't appraise it. The Appraisal results, though, feel like they're being written out in my brain. I can see them with my mind's eye, which I guess counts enough.

If I can get Appraisal's level up high enough, maybe my skills will start being displayed as part of the results. Then I'd be able to appraise them directly. Well, until that time, I don't really have much choice but to set these unknown and unusable skills aside.

* * *

Well then, let's take this huge thing that I just barely managed to kill... and eat it! To start, I put up a new simple home so that other monsters wouldn't want to barge in on me and steal a piece. This thing is absolutely huge, so huge that I probably won't be able to eat it all in one go. I should stick around here, then, until I've finished it all up. I'll put extra care into making this simple home perfect.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Spider Silk (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Oh, here's another good thing! The Spider Thread skill, which almost never seemed to acquire any experience, finally leveled up. What have I been doing differently? Did this happen because I was using my threads so heavily while fighting the snake? My two primary offensive skills are Poison Fang and Spider Silk, so if I keep fighting, they will of course be going up as well. Seriously, the stat points I get on level-up don't seem to have anywhere near as strong of an effect on my combat effectiveness as my skills do.

Humming to myself, I get back to eating my lunch. Before that, though, I need to peel all of these scales off. These things are seriously way too damn hard! There's no way I can eat them. I really have to do this, otherwise I won't be able to eat at all.

I got them all offffff! Ugggh, I'm beat. That was way more tedious work than I thought. The scales are very tough, and they don't peel off easily, so it took a very long time. It took off nearly a quarter of the red overall-stamina meter, even after leveling up had raised it back up to full! This was definitely heavy labor.

But now, thanks to that, I can eat as freely as I want! So, let's dig in.

Ewwh, bitter! Way too bitter! Is this the poison? If it's this bitter, then this guy must have had a ridiculously powerful venom. Man, it would have been awful if I had gotten bit!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

Yep. The meat may be bitter, but the skill rank sure is sweet.

26 Anti-shut-inification

It's been a while since I defeated the snake. There's no real way for me to measure time here in the dungeon, so I don't really know how long it's been. In the meantime, all I've really been doing is eating and sleeping. I'm still not done eating the snake, and new food keeps getting itself caught up in my webs, so I can't really leave. I started out by thinking this was a nice little vacation, but I'm starting to get a little worried. If this keeps up, I'm going to become a shut-in again!

I've accidentally amassed quite a mound of monster corpses. Seriously, yeah, a mound of bodies. ...heh, Yamada's body.¹² Y'know, Yamada, a dude from my class? Back in my previous life? Ah, nah, well, it's not like that matters anymore.

What's important is that this pile of meat just won't stop getting taller. I have been diligently killing every single thing that gets stuck in my webs, then onto the pile it goes. Back when I was still living in my real home, I'd eat everything as soon as I caught it. Now, though, I've got this snake to go through, and I don't want to start anything else until I'm done with that, so... yeah, I'm building up quite a pile.

There haven't been any ridiculous bodybuilders who can rip through my webs like that snake did, so for the most part killing everything has been super easy. At some point, a level six monster showed up, and it certainly was strong! ...It's in the pile now, though. Well, just because you've got a high level doesn't mean you're actually strong.

I'm level nine. Going by level alone, I'm on even footing with where that snake was. But the difference in raw battle power is straight-up overwhelming. I wouldn't even trust myself to fight some of these lower-level monsters outside of my webs!

I really think that there's some kind of species factor that weighs much more heavily into strength than level. If I fought against a foe of a superior species, I'd be at a serious disadvantage, even if we were the same level. You'd think that the difference in level would be a good indicator of relative strength, but it really looks like it only works like that when it's two members of the same species. To give a really extreme example, imagine if that enormous spider from back then was only level one. There's absolutely no way I could win that fight. No matter how hard I tried, a fight against something that huge would end in a flash. I really should be thinking of the difference in level as more of a suggestion.

Now that I think about it, though, when I was fighting that snake, it might have even had a level advantage! Through sheer chance, I only encountered it after I'd put together this simple home to rest in, which is basically the only reason I was able to win. If I were to have come across it unprepared, that would have been it.

So far, three quarters of this snake have vanished into my belly. Man, should I be thinking that I got through three quarters of that enormous thing, or that I still have one more quarter to go? Hm, with the flow of monsters steadily accumulating on top of my pile, I should probably think of it as still having a quarter left.

With this much stored up, there's a serious risk that this stuff is going to start rotting before I can get to it. I mean, I have Decay Resistance, so eating spoiled food might not be the worst thing I could do to my stomach. Even better, if it's just a little bit rotten, I might be able to grind up Decay Resistance's level while I eat! The taste? Man, I've been forcing myself to choke down all this disgustingly bitter poisonous food, I'm sure I can handle a little bit of rot.

¹² A pun. More literally, it's "The prey that I've killed these past few days are stacked high as a mountain. A mountain... yes, a mountain. ('yama... sou, yama da.') It's not Yamada, though." I have done my very best to localize it, at the cost of somewhat altering the meaning. Please enjoy the bloody, mangled corpse of what was already a stupid pun.

Umf. Really, I can't leave until I've gone through all of this food. I think that, if I can somehow finally finish off the rest of this snake, I'll be able to get through the rest of my stores faster than they can accumulate. Assuming, of course, that another huge monster doesn't show up before then. Seriously, if I don't finish this up soon, I'm going to revert back into a crazy shut-in. I may have designed this home as a temporary one, but I've been stuck here long enough that it's been getting built-up almost as my previous full-scale home.

Hm? Wait, you say? Why would I strengthen my home when all that's going to do is make it catch more monsters, you ask? Hmmmmm?

Nah. Any monster who dares lay eyes upon this fortress will almost certainly flee. My previous home had been designed to lure and catch prey, so my webs had been built out of extremely fine silk, almost impossible to see. This home, though, is built out of thick, tough threads.

Oh, what a coincidence, my webs are vibrating again. Seems like yet another thing has blundered into them. Oof. My food supplies are still increasing, aren't they. I really didn't think gluttony would be so troublesome.

To start with, I walk over to where my prey have been ensnared. It sure seems to be struggling a ton; have I caught another huge monster? If that's the case then there's no way I'm going to be finishing up my food stores anytime soon, which will lead me even further down the path of the shut-in. I was really hoping for a small one! Ugh, too much food. First world problems.

Elro Randanel — LV 3 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Randanel — LV 3 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Randanel — LV 4 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

I caught three things this time, in one go. Ahhhhh, are these the same three that I dealt with back at my original home? Don't tell me these all come as a set. Getting three things at the same time is definitely way more than one big thing. ...In terms of meat, that is.

I tie them all up more securely, pull them out of my web, then wrap all three of them together. This kind of releasable web is a new technique I came up with over the last few days. It's super convenient, I don't have to painstakingly cut through each thread to get things out.

I fix up the hole real quick, then make my way back inside while dragging my bundle. Ugh, this is seriously heavy, dragging all three of them. It would have been a huge pain, but I really should have carried these things in one by one.

HrrrrRRRAGH! Whew, that was heavy to the point where I'm seriously hurting. Did I strain something? My HP certainly went down. Damn it. I'm going to take it out on these jerks! Sure, this might be extremely unfair, but they're in no position to complain!

So, then, *chomp! Chomp! Chomp!*

“Experience requirements met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you have grown from level 9 to level 10. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up. You have acquired additional skill points.”

“Level requirement met. Small Lesser Taratekt, you are eligible for evolution.”

Uh, what?

27 I'm evolving!!!

As I leveled up, I was informed of something completely unexpected. "Evolution", was it? Is that... what I think it is...? Like in that one game, where you catch and raise, uh, pocket monsters, right?

"You have a choice in evolutionary forms. Please choose between [Lesser Taratekt] and [Small Taratekt]."

Oh... oh! Ummm, hang on, one sec. Uno momento, por favor.

Okay, let's think this through. This kind of thing is a huge turning point in a person's life. I'm not a person, though, I'm a spider. There's no way I'm going to just pick one randomly.

I'm going to evolve. Well, that's okay. This world's basically a game, right? It's totally not unthinkable for video game evolution to be a thing here. Man, once we start digging, there's no end to the similarities, is there.

Well, when you say "evolution", it really makes me think of a powerup. I'm given the option to evolve, but I really don't have a choice, right? Right. Although... I do remember that there were some games where not evolving was advantageous sometimes. Eh, but those were seriously in the minority of games, so I think evolving is a pretty safe choice.

The problem is, there are two different forms that I have to choose between. "Lesser Taratekt" and "Small Taratekt". Going by the names alone, there's really not that much difference. I'm getting rid of either "Lesser" or "Small" from my species. Aaaaargh, why can't I use Appraisal on what the "Voice of Heaven" says?! I'd be able to find out these differences immediately!

Hmmmmmm. Well, let's just take a stab at it. A Lesser Taratekt is... probably the adult form of my current species, since I'm just dropping "small" from the name. A Small Taratekt, though, is dropping "lesser". Does that mean that I'd no longer be an "inferior breed" of Taratekt? I'd still be small, though, so I'd still be just a hatchling.

If I'm thinking along the right lines here, and I think I am, my choice is obvious.

It's gotta be Small Taratekt.

I really don't think staying as an "inferior breed" is a good idea. Think about it. If I pick Small Taratekt, I'm guaranteed to have at least one more evolution, from Small Taratekt to a regular Taratekt. I don't know what exactly will change when I evolve, but I know that it's going to be a good power boost, so I should really pick the option that seems like it will give me the most options down the road. Sure, you might want to think that a Lesser Taratekt might also have evolution options, but there's no way I'm going to make such an important decision off of such an unfounded hope.

On top of that, if I become a Lesser Taratekt, I'm probably going to grow larger. This is, quite frankly, terrifying. Adults are, of course, bigger than children, but usually a creature gets bigger gradually. In this ridiculous fantasy world, though, growing up via evolution may work in a "POOF! You're big now!!" kind of fashion. And, really, since I can't guarantee that isn't actually the case, I really, really shouldn't pick that option. I don't think I'd get quite as large as that enormous spider from earlier, but there's a definite possibility that I'd grow too big to fit through these tunnels.

I remember seeing a huge monster, a Finjagoat, a while ago. It was so big that it had trouble fitting down these passageways, even if they're three meters wide. Trying to move around while being that large would

seriously suck. Finjagoats probably normally live in a much more spacious part of the cave so, I'd bet that one had gotten lost and wound up in these smaller tunnels.

Since getting big would make it hard for me to move, I'd really rather remain the size I'm at now. So, that's another point in the Small Taratekt's favor.

Right. I've decided. I shall evolve... into a Small Taratekt!!

“Small Lesser Taratekt, you are now evolving into a Small Taratekt.”

Ah, yep. This started really quickly. The Voice of Heaven(???) blasted its way into my head as unceremoniously as usual, even though this is such a momentous occasion! Please, be a little more respectful! I'm trying very hard to ev...o...l.....v.....e.....

* * *

“Evolution has completed. You have become a Small Taratekt. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from evolving: your skill [Taboo (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Corruption Magic (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, your skill [Decay Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Kartikeya (LV 1)] has been increased to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Whoa!? Eh? Heh? Did... did I fall asleep?! Wait, no, that really felt more like my consciousness was shattered apart, with how quickly it faded. Did evolving cause this? Hey! Voice of Heaven!! It would have been just a tiny little bit nice to know that evolution causes sudden unconsciousness!!

Hmm? Wait, am I done evolving? I can't really see any differences, physically... ah! Appraisal got turned off. Let me turn it back on real quick, so that I can confirm things for myself...

Small Taratekt — LV 1 — (no name) Statistics: Weak

Oh! Ohhh... ohh? Hmmmmmm? The species name changed! Does that mean evolution was successful? ...Level one, though? Like, does evolving decrease my level? ...Oh no, does it reduce my stats as well?! I have no way to compare! Appraisal still only says I'm weak! ...Ugh, it still only says I'm weak...

Ah, but, now that I'm looking, I can see that my red general-stamina meter has somehow completely emptied itself. Plus, the sluggishness I was feeling from overeating is gone. ...I'm really hungry now. Did evolving seriously burn through all of the food that I had eaten? Well, uh, it's a good thing that I'd been stockpiling so much.

You know, I'm actually really glad this evolution happened safely, because it's risky as hell. I lose consciousness and wake up starving. Next time this happens, I'm going to need to make sure I'm well-prepared.

28 Eating, eating, eating.

In order to restore the stamina that nearly ran out while I was evolving, I've been doing nothing but eating. First to go was the rest of the snake. All of that meat that I was having so much trouble eating before now rests within my belly.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Resistance (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Just as I finished eating the snake, Poison Resistance's level went up. I got two skill levels out of that thing. Tasty, tasty!

Man, before I evolved, eating this much would have caused my stomach to swell up like a balloon. It's not really doing that anymore, though... where is it going, some kind of pocket dimension? It's like whatever I'm eating is disappearing. While my food stocks are diminishing, though, my red stamina meter is steadily refilling. Hmmmm. I've seen a ton of really strange phenomena since I came to this world, but I think my stomach is the strangest of them all. What the heck is up with this thing?

Well, I shouldn't put too much effort into thinking about this. “It's just that kind of world” is a good enough explanation. I'll leave explaining the rest of these phenomena to the academics.

Anyhow, even after finishing off that snake, my stomach isn't even swelling a little bit, and if it's not swollen, there's no way it's full yet. Plus, my red stamina meter isn't full yet.

Luckily, I've got this huge mound of monster corpses stacked up in my home, stacked tall enough that, before I evolved, I had no idea how I could possibly get through all of it. I should be able to get even this enormous pile inside my new pocket-dimension belly, hmm...

Well, let's dig in. I eat, and eat, and eat, I do nothing but eating. Umf, in my past life I had such a tiny appetite, but I've become a pretty serious gourmand! I could dominate the competitive eating scene like this.

Ahh, maaan, what is up with my stomach?! I have clearly shoved more food down my throat than the entire volume of my body, yet I can still eat more! It totally, seriously looks like my stomach is connected to a pocket dimension. I know I just said that I was going to leave the thinking to the academics but seriously this is my own body! I have a right to be curious! No matter how curious I am, though, it's not like I can get an answer, so maybe I'm just being impatient... Stop! No thinking! Without thinking about anything, eat in stoic silence!

I eat, and eat, and eat, and... oh? I'm out. ...Whuh? Did I seriously eat all of that food? ...I did. Nothing's left. Seriouslyyyy? I'm not even full yet! My stamina meter's not full yet either. Even after all of this food, I'm still not full? Maaan.

Please don't tell me it's going to be like this forever. Please tell me I'm only extra-hungry because I used up all of my energy evolving! I'm going to starve to death otherwise, there's no way I can find that much food. That would suck. That would reeeeeeally suck. Seriously, you know, that's... impossible, right? Seriously, it's impossible, right? If it's true then I just stepped on a really big evolutionary land mine.

Ahh! Now that I'm thinking about it, evolution really is a land mine, isn't it? I passed out, lost all of my energy, and was left defenseless for who knows how long. I was okay because I was in my home, but how do other monsters manage it? Man, I got really, really lucky with this one.

Even though I managed to get through evolving in one piece, running out of energy is a serious problem! Anything that didn't have piles of food stored up like I did would have to drag themselves around, with no energy, hoping to find prey. They'd totally be at a huge disadvantage in a fight, right? Maaaaan, I got lucky.

Is this the bonus I get for being the main character, or was it just coincidence? Ehhh, well, it's not like they'd ever make a spider the protagonist, anyway. My life has been sufficiently awful so far that I can't really say I've been lucky overall.

There's a definite chance that this is going to happen again when I hit level ten, so I need to make sure that I'm prepared for it, starting from when I hit level nine. I happened to stumble on the perfect combination of circumstances for a flawless evolution, but if I'm not set up for it next time, then there's no chance it's going to go anywhere near as smoothly as this. Ahh, seriously, bringing down that snake was the best thing that could have happened! If I hadn't been forced to sit still and eat through its corpse, I wouldn't have made a home, and wouldn't have accidentally stockpiled all of this food. Sir Snake, I thank you, from the bottom of my heart!

Now then! While I've certainly recovered a bit, my belly is still not full. And, since I've cleaned out my larder, there's no need for me to stick around here any more. Let's anti-shut-in-ify! And so, as I set off on my aimless journey, I bid farewell to the home that has taken care of me.

Thank you, my second home! Though I may have arrived thinking that my stay would be brief, you kept me safe for as long as I needed to stay. Farewell!

I depart triumphantly. My first order of business is to fill up my stomach, which means finding prey to hunt. Once that's done... I guess I'm going back to wandering the dungeon, looking for the exit if I can.

My next evolution is probably going to require me to get bigger. My size didn't change as a result of this evolution, so the possibility is still out there that evolving will make me get way bigger all at once. I'm a little bit uneasy with how small these passages are, then. I'd really like to try to find someplace bigger, if at all possible. Really, my best option is to go outside. Worst case scenario is that I get really big while in the dungeon, only to find that the only exit is really tiny, making it impossible to leave. Yeahhhh, and I don't think I could take it if I had to live out the rest of my life here...

Yeah. Well, for now, let's find something to eat. We'll worry about what comes next once we get there.

29 I evolved, but nothing's changed.

I found my first target.

Elro Ferekt — LV 3 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

Another one of these frogs that I've kept running into. Its level's way higher than the other ones, though.

Hmmmm. I have no idea how my stats changed after evolving, and I'm kinda wanting to test them out. I'm betting that evolving made them stronger, though.

Though... my level did get set back down to one. Until now, whenever it went up, my stats were increased. If they got dropped back down when my level got reset, that would be seriously dangerous. Well, I don't quite think that's the case, but there are definitely games with leveling systems like that, where you get weak immediately after you evolve but then get way stronger after you recover from that. Kind of like a "New Game +" sort of thing, but if that were to happen in reality the results might be disastrous.

Yeah. I'm probably worrying about nothing, but, still, let's proceed with caution. Since I'm a still little bit concerned, I'm not going to charge in and do anything reckless. My life is on the line, after all, and discretion is the better part of valor.

I stealthily creep up the wall, take my position on the ceiling, and start to creep forward, upside-down. When I arrive just above the frog, I string one line between me and the ceiling, then use a separate thread to weave a mini-web around my forelegs. Preparations complete! I get ready to lower myself down.

Three... two... one... *GO!!*

I plunge from above, mini-web stretched out before me. Before the frog can even flinch, it's been wrapped in my web, and I cling to its back as I continue to spray more silk. When it's tied too tightly to struggle, I bite at it through my webs! **CHOMP!**

Hmm! Not bad, if I do say so myself. Perhaps I should start calling myself Assassin? Ehehehe. Who could possibly win against my silk and my fangs?!

Ahh, well, first off, I've got a frog to eat.

Hmm, but seriously, though. I evolved, but I'm still doing basically the same things. I originally set out with the goal of gaining some more practical combat experience, but lately I think I've not really been keeping up with that. The monsters here are way stronger than me, you know? If it's a straight up fight, my life will be on the line, you know? I'm seriously not finding any monsters of a suitable level for me to practice against. I'm getting really good at my sneak attack assassination combo, though, but I'm not always guaranteed a sneak attack. If I've built a nest, then there's no way I'll have the element of surprise against anything that tries to break through it! And wasn't the entire reason why I set out on this quest to get strong enough to defend my home?

No, no! I've evolved! My level's gone up! Even my base stats have gone up, and that alone is huge! My actions until now have not at all been for naught! Think of it like that!

Hooooohf. I nearly wrote off all of my progress as meaningless. That's bad, that's bad.

Ummmf. Still, out here in reality, relying one hundred percent on sneak attacks is actually really dangerous. When I lost my home, that was because I was relying too heavily on the power of my webs. What I need is

to come up with a new weapon, any weapon! ...Hah, if I could just come up with one that easily though, life would be great...

Just off the top of my head what about my currently-unusable Corruption Magic? If I could figure out how to use this thing, a whole new world of tactics would open up to me. Of course, I don't have the manual. Grr.

If I was a human, I'd be able to learn how to use this from another human, right? Ah well, even if I wonder about that it's not like it's going to make a difference. Being forced to do everything myself is both kind of nice and a huge pain. It's nice because I don't have to subject myself to the rest of humanity, but having to tackle every problem on my own is a ton of effort! Either way, it's not like I could get any information out of humans. I can't talk.

Hmm, I could do it if I was telepathic, couldn't I? Oh, right, haven't I been earning more skill points? If I've been getting ten points per level, by the time I hit level ten I should have saved up a hundred. It cost me a hundred points to learn Appraisal, so I should be able to pick up a new skill with what I've got now.

Hey, Ms. "Voice of Heaven"! What do you think, can I get it?

"You currently possess 200 skill points. The skill [Telepathy (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?"

Ohhhh! I can!

Hmmmm. Is telepathy even useful to me at the moment, though, with nobody around? Nah, bzzt, rejected.

Although, I have two hundred points! Maybe I've been gaining twenty points per level. Ah! That means that by the time I've hit level six, I'll be able to afford another skill! I bought Appraisal right when I started, and although it was pretty useless when I got it, I've been able to slowly grind it up into something useful. I still think I might have done something wasteful.

Hmm? Ah, wait, wait. Let's think back a little harder. Didn't I try, back when I was level six, to buy another skill, and... fail, because I didn't have enough skill points, right? Hmmmm?

Well, it could be that skill points are increased both by leveling up and evolving. I have no real way to determine what it really is, though! Let's put aside the problem of skill point increases for now.

30 Let's pick up a new skill!

Well then, I've got a bunch of skill points, so I'd really like to pick up a new skill. I can't really do so carelessly, though. I picked up Appraisal on a whim and basically immediately regretted it.

While I've got my safety secured, let's spend some time thinking about this. I throw together a temporary home, ignoring the bones of the frog that I've finished eating. Man, I'm getting pretty good at putting basic homes like these together.

All right. Time to focus.

What skills shouldn't I take? Corruption Magic has taught me that I should, well, just straight-up avoid anything that has to do with magic. I have no idea how to actually use it! Really, I should steer clear of any skills that I can't figure out how to use from the name alone.

I should also really avoid buying any skills that I might earn myself. From what I've seen so far, each skill has some sort of skill proficiency associated with it. When I've accumulated enough proficiency in the skill, the level of the skill goes up. Even if I don't have a single level in the skill, though, it looks like proficiency still accumulates, and when I finally get enough proficiency, I get the skill. Granted, the only skills I've acquired this way were resistances, so maybe that sort of thing is unique to resistance skills. Still, if there's a chance that I might be able to learn it by myself, I shouldn't be spending any skill points on it.

When I look at it that way, maybe spending skill points on Appraisal wasn't actually a terrible idea. How could I have possibly worked to acquire Appraisal if I were starting from scratch? It's also ridiculously fortunate that I figured out how to use Appraisal immediately, unlike magic. Man, I've been complaining about how worthless and unusable this skill is, but this might be one of the rare few skills that are actually usable out of the box.

Okay, so, if I pick a skill, it not only has to be a skill that I can figure out how to use, but also needs to be one that I wouldn't pick up on my own. That's actually a pretty harsh restriction, you know! Seriously, all I have to go on is a skill's name, with no clue about what it actually does, which is, quite frankly, terrifying. On top of that, I have to keep checking with the, uh, "Voice of Heaven" to see if there's even a skill that matches the name I'm looking for.

From what I've seen so far, if I want to spend skill points to acquire a skill, I need to tell the "Voice of Heaven" that I'd like to purchase it. If I ask her about a skill that exists, she responds; if it doesn't exist, though, she remains silent. So, in order to find out what skills exist, I've been constantly spamming the "Voice of Heaven" with requests.

Since I've been sending enquiries whenever I've got any downtime, I've started to put together a list of skills that I might want to pick up. Of those skills, there's five that meet my criteria: Poison Claw, Thread Manipulation, Automatic HP Recovery, SP Cost Reduction, and Detection.

Poison Claw and Thread Manipulation are skills that will, hopefully, make me stronger. Poison Claw is, well, Poison Fang, but in claw form, and Thread Manipulation is a support skill to help me use my threads more effectively. There's a couple of problems, though: if I pick up Poison Claw, it's probably going to be way weaker than Poison Fang at the beginning, and I'm not one hundred percent certain that I'll be able to figure out how to use Thread Manipulation.

Automatic HP Recovery and SP Cost Reduction are totally background support skills. If they work just like their names imply, they're going to be extremely handy to have around.

Last but not least is the riskiest choice: Detection. In this dungeon, I have a serious need for a way to detect surprise attacks. I think Detection is the right skill for the job, but I'm not really sure what its effect will be... or, again, how to even use it. If I pick this skill, it's a serious gamble.

I've found plenty of other skills, but this is the lineup that I'm really interested in. My life is on the line here, so I can't really afford to be too sentimental here. There's definitely other skills that I wanted, but didn't have enough skill points to obtain. Like, you know, Immortality. I'm probably off by an entire order of magnitude, on that one.

Hmmmm. I'm torn. I mean, with these skills, I'm not really working to come up with any new strategies, I'm just figuring out how to strengthen my existing ones. Well, this is really what I'm reduced to if I'm trying to avoid picking up any more awful skills. For now, I guess I should pull HP Recovery from the list. If my HP hits zero, I'm probably going to die, right? If I'm an assassin, I should be avoiding any sort of situation where my HP could go down to begin with.

Four more to pick from, hmm... what should I dooooo? I mean, there's SP Cost Reduction, which doesn't really have any downsides I can think of. It's my safest choice. Picking up Poison Claw would probably let me broaden my combat tactics, but getting its level up to a usable point is going to be super slow! If I can figure out how to use Thread Manipulation, it'll be a serious boost to my combat ability... but, of course, if I can't figure it out, then it's yet another useless skill I'm hobbled with. Detection, as I mentioned earlier, is a gamble.

Mmmmmmm.

Umf. Alright, I've decided.

“You currently possess 200 skill points. The skill [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

Yes.

“You have acquired the skill [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)]. You have 100 skill points remaining. The skill [Detection (LV 1)] can be acquired for 100 skill points. Would you like to acquire it now?”

Yes!

“You have acquired the skill [Detection (LV 1)]. You have 0 skill points remaining.”

I've picked up Thread Manipulation and Detection. I know I was just saying things about putting my life on the line, but I've seriously just picked up the two biggest gambles from my list. Ahahaaaa... I'm really not cut out for gambling. Well, it's not like there's any going back now. I've picked up these two skills, and if I can't use them, I'll cry.

...I don't know if spiders can cry, though.

S3 Fantasy

Spread across my lap is a picture book. In it are amazingly realistic pictures of strange and fantastic creatures, the likes of which were never seen on Earth. It seems that, in this world, monsters are real.

“This is a goblin! Goblins are monsters that have green skin, and they’re about as large as a human child. They look kind of like a human, but they’re not very smart at all. They don’t have very many skills, and their stats are very low. You shouldn’t take them lightly, though! When it levels up and learns a few skills, one can pick up a weapon and be quite dangerous if you don’t expect it.”

Anna, my nanny, is sitting next to me, describing the monsters in the book out loud for me. Anna looks like she’s in her twenties, but in reality she’s nearly twice that age. Apparently, she used to be a magician who fought against the monsters, and now she’s explaining to me the things that the picture book leaves out.

On my other side, my little sister Sue is imitating me by staring at the book. Recently, she’s taken to copying me a lot. Unlike me, though, she can’t yet speak very well, and I don’t think she can understand Anna’s words very well. I’m paying very close attention to what Anna is saying, though. One of us should, at least.

I pat my adorable sister on the head, ruffling her light-blue hair. It feels smooth to the touch. Sue looks quite pleased, and lets out a happy giggle.

Anna and Clevea, our other servant who’s standing by the door, look at us smilingly. I used to think that the attention was a little bit embarrassing, but I’m pretty used to it by now.

“My prince, you and the princess seem quite close,” says Anna. “Yeh!” exclaims Sue. “Yes!” I say, almost simultaneously. Anna’s smile grows broader. It looks like I’m getting pretty good at playing the part of an adorable toddler.

I go back to looking at the picture book. Anna doesn’t know it yet, but I’ve already learned to read this country’s language, so I’ve been reading the descriptions of each monster while pretending to enjoy looking at the pictures. This really is a picture book, though, so the illustrations fill each page with only a small amount of space left over for a short description. I’m glad that Anna is explaining things more clearly.

The more I listen to Anna talk, though, the more I realize how fucking crazy this world is. These people are seriously talking, with a straight face, about skills, stats, and levels. These are video game terms!

This world seems to be very much like a game. Well, I’m living in it, so I don’t really think of it as a game itself, but that doesn’t change the fact that it’s full of all of these game-like systems.

Skills seem to be pre-defined abilities, drawn out of your soul once you’ve had enough practice. Stats are discrete measures of our raw abilities. Levels seem to be a numerical representation of the power you amass as you go through life.

This was all explained to me, but from a gamer’s perspective, these are some extremely flimsy explanations. Everyone seems to take them at face value, not even bothering to ask why things are this way. I’m really not comfortable with this, but I don’t have much of a choice but to play along.

I turn the page on my book, revealing a picture of an enormous wolf. To show how large it is, there’s a person lying at its feet. I thought for a moment that the scale had been exaggerated, but Anna’s explanation proved otherwise.

“This is called a Fenrir. It’s a Mythic-ranked monster, said to be as large as a mountain and capable of destroying a fortress with one bite. I’m lucky to have never seen one myself.”

This certainly seems to be true. This giant wolf is far too big to be called a monster, though. It's a kaiju¹³. How can the world be this unbelievable, allowing such an enormous creature to exist? How does it keep up its enormous bulk?

"Umm, how does this stand up?" I ask. Anna stares at me blankly. Perhaps I need to clarify. "It's so big, isn't it heavy?"

Comprehension flashes across Anna's face. "Ah," she says, "it might be better for me to show you than to tell you. Clevea?"

Clevea comes closer. Like Anna, Clevea used to serve this country as a knight, and is now working as both a nanny and a bodyguard. Unlike Anna the magician, whose frame is very slender, Clevea has a powerful, almost masculine body that she built through years of training.

Anna and Clevea quietly discuss something, then take up positions a few paces from each other. Clevea extends an open hand out towards Anna.

"Here it comes. *Fireball*," chants Anna, casting a spell at Clevea.

Fireball is a low rank fire spell that, exactly as its name implies, creates a small ball of fire and launches it at your opponent. The flaming sphere, which was cast with low power, streaks forward and hits Clevea in her outstretched hand. Sue stiffens in surprise. I was a little surprised as well, suddenly seeing magic for the first time.

Anna and Clevea exchange smirks over our reaction, like they'd just pulled off a successful prank. I feel a little offended.

"Your hand... hurt?" asks Sue, looking at Clevea's hand.

"Only a little bit, Princess. It was very hot for a moment, but it's fine now!" says Clevea, in a powerful voice that's unusually deep for a woman. "As you have just seen, if your stats are high, you can become quite strong. That's how such large monsters can move without being crushed by their own weight."

I'm curious, so I reach out to feel the palm of Clevea's hand. Her hands are tough and calloused, as expected of someone who fights with a sword. But it's still ordinary skin. It's nowhere near tough enough to be able to take a fireball head-on without even getting singed.

"My prince, when you raise your defensive attributes, your skin does not necessarily become tough," says Clevea. "Really?" I ask. "Yes, my prince. High defense does not make your body physically tougher, it makes you harder to injure. While I'm nowhere near this powerful myself, I've heard that the Heroes of previous generations could withstand direct sword blows without taking a scratch," says Clevea, answering my question politely.

However, to become hard to hurt like that, wouldn't the intercellular binding forces have to be somehow increased? Well, in this fantastical world, trying to reconcile things I see with my knowledge from Earth is a waste of my time. For now, I'll set aside these troubled thoughts.

¹³ I'm leaving this as "kaiju" because I feel like the word (meaning giant monster, like Godzilla) has been sufficiently exposed to Western audiences through pop culture, like Pacific Rim, and Shun does not strike me as the kind of guy who would namedrop Godzilla

31 I've picked up new... skills.....

Hoooof. Right! Let's test out these new skills.

First up is Thread Manipulation. Based on its name, it should be a skill that makes my spider silk much more useful. My already-unstoppable webs are going to become even more powerful! This is the best. Let's start by spinning some silk.

The next step is the problem. If I can't figure out how to actually manipulate my threads, picking up this skill was pretty worthless. I'm really, really hoping that this isn't the same thing as what happened with Appraisal.

Move... moooooove...! Wait, my threads feel a little funny. ...Hm? What the heck? There's a weird feeling that's kind of hard to put into words... almost like there's something... in... my threads? It almost feels like there's nerves in my threads, like they're... alive? I focus on whatever is in my threads, and will it to move.

Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle.

With a wiggly sound that I'm pretty sure is all in my head, my threads start to sluggishly move a little.

Yep! I made it move. I don't really have the kind of control I need to use it in combat, though...

Ugghhhhh, okay, fine! I knew this was going to happen! I was aware of this possibility! I'm happy I got it to move at all! I had no hopes, no expectations for anything better!

Haaaaah. Hm? My mana went down a bit? I've never seen that happen before, is this from using Thread Manipulation? Ahhhhh, Thread Manipulation consumes mana, hmm... Well, I haven't been using mana at all until now so this is fine. I should work on leveling this when I can, since I'll have mana to spare. I'm choosing to believe that this is going to be useful in the long-term.

I take a moment to compose myself, and turn to the next thing: Detection. Okay! I have zero expectations. This was an even bigger gamble than Thread Manipulation was. I have no idea if I can even use it! To be perfectly honest, I don't even know if it has the enemy-detecting functionality that I'm hoping for. I can't even rule out the possibility that you're a completely unrelated skill, Detection! On top of that, it's level one, so I should be prepared for something as worthless as Thread Manipulation or even how Appraisal was when I first got it. If I can figure out what it does and how to use it, that's already cause for celebration.

Well, let's try it like I do with Appraisal: clear my mind, concentrate, and think, "Detect." Ah! I'd kind of had a sort of image in my head that it would be like meditating, and it looks like I was pretty close: through senses that were previously dark, I can suddenly see so many things...

W... wait, what?

Each little wisp of information is so insubstantial that I have no idea what it could mean. And... there's so much of it! My brain is drowning under a deluge of information from all sides!

Erk!!

Just like when I overused Appraisal, the violent wave of information crashes into me like a punch to the head. I frantically cut Detection off immediately.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2."

What? Wasn't that too fast? Did you seriously just level up?! I mean, that certainly was a ton of information, but, uh, seriously?

Aha, ha, no, wait. First off, what the hell was that?! Whatever that was is completely and utterly unlike what I was thinking of when I asked for detection! I want to scream! Get me the manager! Hey! "Voice of Heaven"! I demand an explanation! This is completely! Utterly! Inconceivably unacceptable!!

Ughhhh. Settle down, me... ..Okay. Let's just double-check to make sure that was, in fact, the result of Detection. This might be a little risky, so I should make sure I'm prepared. Inhale... Exhale. Right! Commence Detection.

Just like before, I'm assaulted by a wave of unintelligible information.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Detection (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3."

I said... that's too... fast! Errrk, that's enough. I cut it off again. Blahhhhh. Ugh, I'm exhausted already.

I've learned one thing, though. Yeah. "Detection". The skill's name is just "Detection". There's nothing that says *what it actually detects!* It does exactly what I thought it does, but way better than I thought could possibly happen! In fact, it works so well that I can't use it at all!

I think this skill gathers information about literally everything around me, and blasts it at me full-force.

That quantity of information just immediately overwhelms my brain's ability to process it. It is extremely likely that it's got enough information in there to let me detect enemies sneaking up on me, somewhere in that enormous flood, but the information is coming at me far too fast for my tiny brain to pick up on it. For that, I'd need more processing power than a supercomputer.

Maaaaan, seriously! I had not even begun to consider the possibility that there could be a skill that was too powerful for me to use. What a trap I just fell into. Seriously, who thought this one up? Do you get off on leaving traps for your players?

Ahhhh. Well, I can't use Detection. I can practice willing my threads to get Thread Manipulation's level up... but if I do that with Detection, won't my head explode? I guess I've got no choice but to shut this away forever. No waaaaay.

Hey, can I get a refund on skills? ...Yeah, not a chance. Uuuugh, I seriously have no luck at gambling. What have I done? This sucks.

Dejectedly, I slump.

32 Growth spurt

Sneaking, sneeeaking...

Fwap!

Roooling, roooling...

CHOMP!

Time to eat!

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 1 to level 2. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up. You have acquired additional skill points.”

Diiiiing. I’m a bit upset I didn’t get any skills, but that’s really alright. Oh, more prey.

Sneeeeeeaking, sneeeeeeaking...

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Stealth (LV 1)].”

Fwap!

Roooling, roooling...

CHOMP!

Time to eat.

Hm? Something happened during all that? Oh yeah, the “Voice of Heaven” (heh) said something. Hmmm... a skill, right? Stealth, right? That’ll make it harder for enemies to notice me, hmm? It’s not like anyone’s been noticing me anyway, so, I don’t really need this... Well, it’s not like I’m going to refuse it if they’re going to give it to me anyway.

Oh, more prey.

Sneeeeeeaking, sneeeeeeaking...

Fwap!

Roooling, roooling...

CHOMP!

“You have earned the title [Assassin], and have been awarded the skills [Stealth (LV 1)] and [Shadow Magic (LV 1)]. Your new skill, [Stealth (LV 1)], has been integrated with your existing skill, [Stealth (LV 1)].”

Eatin’ time.

Oh? I heard something again. A title? This is the first title I've gotten since I picked up Filth Eater and Kin Eater way back when, huh... I tried a bunch of different things to get some titles a while ago, but nothing worked. Assassin, huuuuuh... I'm seriously turning into a ninja, here.

Whoa, even more prey.

Sneeeeeeeaking, sneeeeeeeeking...

Fwap!

Roووolling, roووolling...

CHOMP!

“You have earned the title [Monster Slayer], and have been awarded the skills [Strength (LV 1)] and [Toughness (LV 1)].”

Time to eat.

Oh? Yet another announcement, huh. Monster Slayer? Maaaaan, but basically all of my time in this dungeon has been spent killing monsters! Why now? Hmm, maybe... maybe this is a title earned for crushing countless monsters. Yeaaaah...

Wha?! Another prey!

Sneaking, sneeeaking...

Fwap!

Roووolling, roووolling...

CHOMP!

Time to eat...

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Overeating (LV 1)].”

Seriously, again? This is a great day for gains. But, seriously, “Overeating”. I mean, what kind of name for a skill is that? That sure sounds pretty negative, doesn't it?

Man, but have I been eating or what? My stomach had completely emptied itself after I evolved, but it's finally starting to swell back up again. Maybe that mysterious food-vanishing stomach was a one-time thing, from right after I evolved. Phewwww. If I'd had to keep filling up my pocket-dimension stomach forever, I'd hit a really bad point on my Engel curve... although, I don't have any money, so I'm not sure if I even fall on an Engel curve¹⁴ to begin with. I'm brooooooke.

...Wait up a bit, hm? I was a bit hungry, so I was just kind of gliding along wherever, but... today's been really good for whatevering my whatevers? I whateverly whatevered my whatevers, so whatever, you know.

Yeah. Let's calm down first, shall we.

My level went up. This is good! This happens a bunch when I hunt, so this isn't really surprising.

¹⁴ [Engel's Law](#) observes that, as income rises, the total percentage of income spent on food falls, even if actual expenditure rises. I'm not entirely sure why she's bringing this up, but Kumoko certainly is spending a large percentage of her time hunting.

Next is my Stealth skill. That's also good! I can't really say it's useful, right now, but it's better than nothing, so I will take it if I can get it.

I got some titles, too! That was a little strange, right? Well, getting titles is good, right? It's seriously great, right? Getting two of them in a row is seriously... well, you know, right?

Let me see... "Assassin" and "Monster Slayer". What dangerous-sounding titles! Ugh, none of my titles are respectable at all. Even after all this time...

So, Assassin is a pretty ninjaesque title. It got me Stealth and Shadow Magic, so of course it's got that kind of feel. With Shadow Magic, can I literally dive into the shadows? If I can strike from the shadows themselves, this will become a seriously useful skill. Of course, y'all are aware I can't use a lick of magic, right? Tell me the gosh-darned instructions, already! Ugghh. The manual, please...

I understand even less about Monster Hunter. What's this? Strength? Toughness? I have no idea what these ridiculously vague skills are supposed to do. Hmmm? Well, if I take these skills exactly at face value, then might these be just straight-up stat bonuses to offense and defense? Maybe it's a support skill that can boost them temporarily? Well, if it's permanent, it would be way better; I have no idea how I'd activate it if it were temporary. Well, either way, I should leave them alone for now.

But then what's with this Overeating skill I got at the end? This seriously has a negative effect, doesn't it? Don't even joke about things like that to a girl, "Voice of Heaven"! I'll beat you up! You callin' me fat?! Wrong! Absolutely wrong!! I just ate a little while ago, that's all this is! I'll be back to my slender self again overnight! Check out this leg, this long and slender leg! A beautiful leg, so thin that it might break at any moment! No human can possibly match the slenderness of my stick-like legs! So who're you callin' fat?! If I hadn't just eaten, you'd be callin' me thin!

Haaah... haaaaaaaah. Man, that was pointless. Nobody ever called me fat in my previous life, so I might have overreacted a little just now. No, people tended to call me skinny or even bony before.

Well, although, today was a pretty spectacular day for progress, wasn't it? This was the first time I've gotten so much stuff all at once. It would be great if I could keep up this pace for eeeeever. Hm? Optimistic? Me? Yyyyyyep!

33 The true face of Ms. Appraisal

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 5)] has been raised to level 6.”

Oh hey there, Appraisal! This is great! I’m pretty sure that level ten is the max level, so right about now is about when you should start getting a little bit more useful, probably! With my heart pounding, I look up at my own Appraisal results.

Small Taratekt — LV 2 — (no name)
Statistics:

HP: 36/36 (green)
MP: 36/36 (blue)
SP: 36/36 (yellow), 34/36 (red)
Avg. Offense: 19
Avg. Defense: 19
Avg. Magic Power: 18
Avg. Resistance: 18
Avg. Speed: 348

What... did... you... say...?!

What? Whaat?!? Whaaaaaat?!?! Who the hell are you, and what have you done with the real Ms. Appraisal? The Appraisal I know is a disagreeable little brat that never fails to disappoint me! She’s certainly not a cool, competent beauty with a can-do attitude like you!! Where have you taken the real Appraisal?! I had a speech lined up and everything! “Ugh, useless...” That’s what I was going to say! Time after time after time I got my hopes up whenever you leveled up, “oh, maybe there will be some new little bit of functionality that will make this useful!”, but no, every single time, “ugh, useless...” and so on! Why do you tear apart my expectations every! Single! Time!! Tell me why! Tell me whyy!!!

Hhah! Hhahh! Haaahhhhh! I... haahhh... got carried away for a bit there, heh. Time to take a deep breath and calm the heck down. Inhale, inhale... exhaaaaaale. Yay, I’m back to my usual self again!!

Aaaaaaaaahh. It’s like Appraisal evolved, or something. This level gave me way more stuff than any previous level did. Seriously, this is one of the things I was hoping I could get out of Appraisal from the beginning! What’s with this sudden change? It’s like, I don’t know, a loser like me suddenly getting super hot in high school and becoming super popular. Ah, that’s a roundabout one, even for me.

In any event, this Appraisal enhancement is awesome. My previously-unknown strengths have been spelled out quite plainly. Plus, since so many of these things have been broken down for me, I’ve got some concrete things I can Appraise now.

Now, just to make sure I’m not missing anything, I’ll double-Appraise all of the vocab words.

***Small Taratekt:** A hatchling of the spider-like monster species known as the Taratekt. It is carnivorous, and its fangs drip with poison.*

***Avg. Offense:** A measure of an individual’s average physical offensive power. As this is an average, the power of each specific body part may be different.*

***Avg. Defense:** A measure of an individual’s average physical defensive ability. As this is an average, the defense of each specific body part may be different.*

Avg. Magic Power: *A measure of the average effectiveness of an individual's magic. As this is an average, the power of a specific type of magic may be different.*

Avg. Resistance: *A measure of an individual's average magical defensive ability. As this is an average, the defense may be different depending on the context.*

Avg. Speed: *A measure of an individual's average aptitude for speed. As this is an average, the quickness of each specific body part may be different.*

Woow, this is amazing. These explanation texts are getting pretty long, huuuh. Ms. Appraisal, becoming this awesome, huh...

Umf. When it says "each specific body part may be different", it's probably talking about something like how a human's hands and feet are different. Their offensive abilities are different, for instance. If my guess is right, then this stat basically lumps everything together and gives the average of that.

But, uh... why are my stats so low? I don't really have anything to compare it to, so I don't quite know just how low they actually are, but I did, briefly, hit level ten; even after evolving, my stats are like this. Lumped in there, though, is my speed stat, which is glowing a strange color. This is weird, right? It's over ten times the value of the rest of my stats. I am seriously Speed-specced.

Ummmf. Well, now that I've got this, I really want to measure myself up against other monsters. Extrapolating from my previous results, it's pretty likely that checking another monster's stats will end in failure. I say "likely", but, really, I have never actually succeeded in getting anything more than my opponent's level. I'm pretty sure this is still going to be the case, even after my Appraisal level went up, but it never hurts to try...

So, let's go look for some prey. Where, oh where, might I find something good...

...Aha, there! Alright then: Appraise!

Elro Greim — LV 2 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Ah, yep, appraising another monster's stats is still difficult, huuuuh. Oh well.

Well, it's the first time I've seen one of these things before, so I'll look up its species.

Elro Greim: *A mouse-like monster species that is native to the Great Elro Labyrinth. It is omnivorous, and its bite is poisonous.*

Hm? Wait up. There was a vocabulary word in that description that I can't just ignore.

Great Elro Labyrinth: *The world's largest labyrinth, it contains the underground passages that tie together Daztordia and Kasanagara continents.*

Well, this was unexpected, but now I know where I am. It seems this dungeon is called the Great Elro Labyrinth. Yeah, I'd noticed that a lot of these monsters were named Elro something-or-others, but to think that's this dungeon's name. World's largest labyrinth, though? No wonder it's so huge. The underground ties between two continents, though? Is this place under the ocean? Whoaa, no waaaay. That's huge! Uh, am I even capable of escaping from a dungeon this big? Aaaah, I'm not going to think about this.

I check out the other two names I picked up.

Daztordia: *The peaceful continent of the tribes of Man. Contains many different human nations.*

Kasanagara: *The continent at the center of the world. Has the largest surface area of all the continents.*

Hmmmmmm, okay. I don't really have anything else to say, here. I mean, if I can get out of here I guess I might want to try to avoid the human-populated Daztordia, but it's not like I have any way to pick.

Well, I managed to figure out more things about my current situation, and I did indeed pick up some useful trivia.

34 Growth Spurt: The Sequel

Well, let's leave Appraisal alone for now and take care of this mouse-thing.

Sneaking, sneeeaking...

Fwap!

Roووolling, roووolling...

CHOMP!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Ooh! My combo's still going! Magnificent. I've been thinking about my awful stats, now that I know them for sure, and I've realized that I've basically got no offensive capabilities whatsoever aside from Poison Fang. It is the first, last, and only weapon in my arsenal, so its level is extremely important.

Hmm, let's call it quits for today. My red total-stamina meter still has a bit of a surplus, and doing useless things is the height of sin.

I put together a new simple home on the spot. Now, since I'm safe, let's dig in... nah. As you'd expect, after eating all of that stuff earlier, I'm not really all that hungry. I mean, it's not like I'm so full I can't eat another bite, but instead of forcing myself to eat it now I think I'd much rather save it until after I wake up.

I say that, but it's not like I'm going to go straight to bed. I've got a thing I'd like to do first...

Wiggle, slither, stretch...

...Uh, what's with that look? I'm not doing anything obscene back here. I'm just practicing Thread Manipulation. I've figured out so far that I can control just one thread at a time. If I want to move it, I need to make it inch along like an earthworm, and it's very slow going. As long as it's still attached to my body, though, the range is pretty large. On the plus side, it barely costs me any mana to keep going. That's all I've got so far.

Really, a weapon of this poor quality can't be used in combat at all. So, before I go to sleep, I'm going to burn through all of my mana practicing with it, so that I can get its level up. Once I get its level up, this poor-quality skill should start getting considerably better. If Appraisal could shape herself up into a can-do kind of girl, I'm sure that Thread Manipulation will also start being useful at about level six. The road to usefulness might be a long one, though.

Once I can get its level up, there's a billion things I want to try out. Silk armor might not be out of the question anymore, and I might be able to come up with a new way to attack. I also want to try out that enemy-detecting thread idea I had from a while ago! Ahh, I can only dream.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Thread Manipulation (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

Ahaha right when I said it you did it!! Level uppp!!

Wiggly wiggle, sliiiiither, stretchy stretch.

Oh ho! These movements aren't bad at all! Truly outrageous, how the level went up and it immediately started moving faster. It's still not yet ready for combat use, but if it gets this much better every time it levels, I might be able to put it into action sooner than expected!

Well, I've still got plenty of mana, so let's keep plugging away at this skill proficiency...

* * *

Yaaaawn! Ah, I slept great! In the end, I stuck with it until my mana was nearly exhausted, and got Thread Manipulation up to level three. I had originally been planning on completely exhausting all of my mana, but once it got pretty low, I got cold feet. I don't know exactly what might go wrong, but I had this kind of instinctive reaction that running completely out would be dangerous, so I cut it off at the last minute.

One night's rest completely recovered my mana! Yeah. Grinding out Thread Manipulation before I go to bed won't be a problem at all, in the future.

No, wait a sec. If I gain it back that quickly, shouldn't I spend it all right when I wake up as well? I don't use any mana at all, normally, so if it recovers naturally over time then it will refill itself while I'm out hunting. Yeah, this is way more efficient. If it turns out that there's some unforeseen problem with doing things this way, then tomorrow I'll just stick to practicing right before I go to sleep. Well, I'll never find out if I don't try!

So, I went back to practicing Thread Manipulation, and right before my mana was about to run out...

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Thread Manipulation (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

...said the “Voice of Heaven”.

Yessss. Good, good. My mana's nearly completely gone, so I can't really test to see how much better it's moving, but since it's level four, it's probably getting pretty good. It's probably not good enough to use in combat, but I should try making myself some armor in the safety of my own home. Tonight's going to be awesome!

Now, let us have some breakfast. The main course for today is yesterday's mouse. Time to eat.

Umf, not good. Eating didn't refill any of my mana, so looks like I won't be able to recover by eating any old thing. There's most likely some sort of equivalent to a mana potion, so there's probably ingredients that will recover your mana if you just eat them raw. I'd bet that the flesh of a strongly-magical monster would work great for recovery! Of course, I haven't seen any magic-wielding magical monsters at all, yet.

Man, after evolving, I've really hit a groove. My skills are steadily leveling up, I got a couple new titles... looks like it's the year of the spider! It's like the whole world is telling me it's my time to shine. Heheheh. Just try and stop me! Heheheee! I'm going to take this groove and ride it all the way through this dungeon. Sure, I know it's freaking enormous, but there's nothing left to do but keep an eye out for the exit. Now then, world, brace yourself, for today I shine!

Hee hee heeee.

35 That's why I said not to get too full of yours—

Ooh hoo hoo hoo. With high spirits, I search the dungeon. Maaan, when I've hit a groove like this, I don't think I can really call any of the monsters around here "opponents". As long as I spot my target before they spot me, I can always finish it with an easy sneak attack. Even if I can't, isn't it possible that, after all this time, I might be able to win in a proper head-to-head fight? I'm pretty sure I got way stronger when I evolved, and my skill levels have climbed up to match. There's no way I'd put on such a pathetic show as when I was fighting that frog way back when. I can't say that I'm guaranteed to win, so I'm the tiniest bit uncertain, but I'm positive I can make it happen.

All this is thanks to the crazy level-up combo I've been carrying since I evolved: my skill levels went up a ton, and I got a bunch of new titles! Aside from my bit of bad luck with respect to Detection, everything recently has been nothing but positive.

Hmm, now that I think about it, this run of good luck started even before I evolved... it was when I defeated that snake, right? My level went up immediately after killing it. Its huge corpse let me stock up a huge pile of food too, which was good, since that let me evolve safely without starving afterwards. My combo just kept on going after that. Oh, yeah. It must have all started with that snake. It was a right pleasure meetin' ya, Mister Snake, thank ya, thank ya.

Oh, the path splits. Left or right, huh? Well, I'll stick to my usual plan and stay to the right as I always do... hm? Somehow, I've got a terrible feeling, the kind of feeling that makes me want to get as far away from here as possible.

I glance over to the left entrance.

Elro Baldarad — LV 5 — *failed to appraise statistics*

Oh, nooo. It's Mister Snaaaake.

Argh, am I an idiot? Sure, this snake is a lower level than the one I killed earlier, but this time I don't have a web set up that it can get stuck in. Uh oh, and it's noticed me! And it looks like it's locked on!!

I flee! I run straight away down the right passageway! Like I could do anything to that kind of monster! Who's the idiot that was just saying there were no real opponents anymore? Me!! No no no no no! It's extremely clear that this thing is on an entirely different level from the other monsters! It's a boss monster! Why are you spawning here like any old normal-type monsters? Are you stupid?!

Aaaa, AAAA! What's this terrifying noise chasing behind me? It's too fast! Holy crap, it can keep up with my speed?! It's 348! I thought I had every other monster beat in the speed department! How is it you're keeping up with me!!

Grk! More monsters, dead ahead?!

Elro Baldarad — LV 5 — failed to appraise statistics

Elro Randanel — LV 4 — failed to appraise statistics

Elro Randanel — LV 4 — failed to appraise statistics

Whaaaaat?! Really? A pack of three, right now?! If it was one of them I could just dodge around it as I ran past but all three of them have me blocked off completely!

Wh... what should I do?! What should I dooooo?! Aaaaah, I'm running out of time!

OKAY! It's do or die! I'm going to stay at full speed, and run along the walls! WhoooOOOAAAAAAA!
Hah! I did it! I did it! Wall run: successful!

Eat my dust, three-pack! There's a terrible noise behind me but there's no way I'm going to turn around to check! I have no idea how long those three can hold out, but now's the time for fleeing, not thinking! Sorry, you three! Survival of the fittest, you know; sacrifice yourselves for me!

Aahaha! I'm going to survive, thanks to those noble sacrifices! Rest in p... hm? Where's the... path...?

W, w, w, wait, no, this, like back with the centipedes?! AaaaAAA! This is bad, this is bad! I'm going too fast, I can't stop, ah, aahhh, n, no, aaaaAAA!

I dive forward to find nothing below me but empty air.

Eh? Ahhh, this is quite an enormous hole. If I were to, perchance, fall straight down it, I would surely perish.

I'm faaalliiiiing!! Nooooo!! Don't joke about bungee jumping without a cord! A cord? A CORD!! Spider silk might save me! I shoot a line at the wall, and it sticks! And, like this...!!

Whoof!

Aaah, that... really hurts. Sure, I stopped my fall, but the whiplash slammed me into the wall at maximum speed. Aaaaah... I thought I was going to die.

I got chased by a giant snake, then when running away flung myself off of a giant cliff. This is what I get for getting too full of myself. I understand now. I shall reflect on this. ...Now that I'm reflecting, I wonder what that buzzing noise I've been hearing for a while is...?

Finjgoat — LV 4 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Finjgoat — LV 3 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Finjgoat — LV 5 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Finjgoat — LV 4 — (failed to appraise statistics)

Ahh, it was wasps. Giant wasp monsters, of a species I've only seen once before. Countless wasps, buzzing past each other in this shaft.

Umm... hello? I'm sorry! Please don't get mad! Seriously, please don't look over this way!!

If they all swoop on me, I've got basically only one option, if I want to dodge it!

Yeah! Another dive! This time, it's going to be different. I've got a thread connecting me to the wall already, so I could make it stretchy and bungee jump off of it. After two or three bounces, I can stick another cord to the wall... and another bungee! Doing all this, I make it to the bottom of this shaft fairly easily.

Alright, back on solid ground again! The sky above me is swarming with wasps. I force my worn-out body to move, running as far away as I can.

S4 Magic

I focus my will, feeling the mana that fills my body. By practicing this technique, I was able to gain the “Mana Perception” skill. Thanks to my continued study, I’ve been able to feel the circulation of mana as it flows within me, almost like the rushing of my blood. With my “Mana Manipulation” skill, I increase the rate of circulation. Steadily, the mana begins to move faster and faster. I concentrate a part of it in my palm. I focus on amplifying the rotation of the mana in my hand more and more, until enough energy accumulates that it transmutes itself into a high-energy form. To complete it, all I need to do is shape it into “magic”.

However, I won’t do it; or, rather, I can’t do it. I slowly return the accumulated mana to the rest of my body, and let it slow to its natural state.

When the mana inside me has calmed, I open the eyes that I had squeezed shut in concentration. Before me, I see Anna, looking at me nervously. Standing next to her is Clevea, but it doesn’t look like she’s noticed anything strange.

“This is dreadful,” says Anna. “Don’t you mean amazing?” asks Clevea. “‘Amazing’ doesn’t even begin to scratch the surface of this. Looking at their raw practical skills alone, the princess is already as skilled as any beginning mage, and his Highness’s skills are surely intermediate-level! Both of their mana capacities exceed what mine were at that age.”

They may be whispering, but many months of straining my ears to try to learn the language of this world gave me the “Enhanced Hearing” skill, so I can hear it just fine.

“That’s what you’d call genius, right?” asks Clevea. Anna nods, gravely.

Genius, huh. I’m really not a genius at all. Granted, I was born with an above-average mana capacity, but it’s really thanks to my consciousness from my previous life. Thanks to that, I’ve been able to practice ever since I was born.

I may be a very young child on the outside, but I’ve got the mind of a high school student. The life of a baby is extremely simple, so I wound up with a lot of free time on my hands. Whenever I started to get bored, I worked on training my magic. Anna, ever the excellent teacher, had given a thorough explanation at one point. It was far too difficult for a child to understand, but a high school student like me had no trouble at all.

Thanks to that, I earned the skills Mana Perception and Mana Manipulation very quickly, and by now I’ve leveled them each up to level five. This is the results of my constant diligence.

Ordinarily it would take a person a very long time to accrue this much skill. I, however, am a baby, and since having magic has always been a dream of mine, I was able to devote all of my free time to practice. Now, I possess a magical talent that far surpasses any other child my age.

Say what you will about me, though, the true genius here is my little sister Sue.

I look over at Sue, sitting next to me. Just by copying what I was doing, Sue figured out how to manipulate magic just like I did. Compared to me, her manipulation is weak and her circulation is slow, but even still, she can move and mold mana quite well.

Manipulating mana is no easy task. Until I acquired the skill, it was practically impossible. To start with, I come from a world where magic does not exist! I had to suppress all of my instincts that were telling me that magic wasn’t real.

I hear that, in general, magical talent manifests itself only as early as five years old. (By the way, a year here is 411 days.) Nobody's ever heard of people able to manipulate magic since birth, apart from me and Sue.

I'm a reincarnated soul who kept the memories and faculties of an adult, which let me practice as much as I wanted. Sue, however, is different. Sue was merely mimicking me. Just from that, just from watching me and following along, she achieved an unheard-of level of control over her magic. Now that is something worthy of calling genius.

To be perfectly honest, I've been uneasy about the future ever since I was born. With Sue's raw natural talent, it's obvious that she's destined to become someone great. I, however, was a perfectly ordinary high school student in my former life, with no special talents to speak of. I may have a lead now thanks to being reincarnated, but once Sue really starts to sprint, she's going to catch up and even overtake me immediately, and my pride as an older brother... no. That's not yet set in stone, and it's still a long ways away. I'm going to do all that I can to keep blazing ahead to widen my lead by as much as I can.

"Umm, why is doin' magic bad?" I say.

Anna has prohibited me from doing magic. All she's letting me do is practice Mana Manipulation. Apparently, if you're good at manipulation, when you acquire a magic skill for a given elemental attribute you can start doing real magic immediately. Knowing that doesn't do me any good, though, since I don't have any attribute skills and have no idea how to acquire them.

"My prince," says Anna, "there are several reasons, but the most important is how dangerous it is. Magic is a very powerful force! Because it is so dangerous, it's long been decided to not teach magic to anyone until they reach the proper age."

I understand what she's saying, but I can't agree with her. I may look like a child, but on the inside I'm well above the proper age! The only one who knows this is me, though. There's nothing I can really do about it, but I'm still impatient.

"Next, we would want to use the Gem of Appraisal to determine your elemental affinity. Learning magics you are not suited to can be a very difficult process."

Gems of Appraisal seem to be magic items capable of showing you the specifics of your stats. Simple ones can apparently be purchased cheaply, but a much more advanced one is required to show elemental affinities. Only the upper echelons of society can acquire a Gem of Appraisal of that caliber. Of course, the Royal Family has one, but I have yet to be appraised.

"My prince, I am sure that you will become a world-class magician, even if you don't hurry. So, let's not get too full of ourselves, right?" "Okay!" I reply.

There's no way I could possibly get too full of myself. After all, I'm still terrified that my younger sister is going to race right past me. It's still not a good idea to be too reckless, though. Now's the time to build a solid foundation, to perfect my basic magical abilities. So, I shall continue practicing my manipulation skills.

36 Driven into a corner

An enormous swarm of wasps buzzes above me. Well! If I don't get out of here quickly, I'm going to have problems.

Of course, by the time I thought that, it was just a little bit too late.

A wasp lands on my back, and suddenly, a blinding pain shoots through me.

!!!!????

Aaargh!! I've been stabbed! And it feels like something got pumped into me when it happened, too! It's poison?!

It's latched onto my back, where I've got no way to protect myself. Wait... I've got one thing! Now is not the time for me to worry about my last few points of mana!

I grab hold of my silk with Thread Manipulation and stick it to the wasp on my back, immobilizing it.

Off... we... GO!!

Seizing the line, I fling the wasp off of me as if I were doing a shoulder throw!

I really want to finish it off, but now's my chance to escape! I find a craggy spot in the walls to hide in. Hopefully, these rocks will make it hard for those giant wasps to maneuver.

Just as I thought, a few wasps chased after me, but after flying around for a while they figured out the deal and buzzed off.

Ahhh, that was close. I definitely didn't come through unscathed, though. I can't see it for myself, but there's a gaping hole in my back. I've got six health left. One single attack dealt me thirty damage.

This is no surprise. I've been more than well aware that my defense is terrible. Really, I'm grateful that spiders are resilient enough that I can keep going, even with this extremely serious wound.

I'm so glad my Poison Resistance is so high. Whatever that wasp pumped into me was almost certainly some kind of poison. I don't know whether it negated it entirely or not, and I don't know how much of this damage was from the wasp's poison or its stinger, but if I didn't have Poison Resistance I would surely be dead by now.

With wounds like these, I probably shouldn't be moving around. I don't know if it's going to heal on its own, so what I really want to aim for is the full-heal I get out of leveling up. So, since I need experience points, and since I need to get myself some food, I should sneak out and retrieve that wasp I threw off of me a little while ago.

Leaving these crags is no sound plan at all, though. I reach out with Thread Manipulation and start to slowly inch the wasp back towards me.

Suddenly, a chill runs through me.

I peek out from behind the crags. Over there, I see the shape of the wasp I tied up. And, over there, I see yet another monster, slowly approaching.

Elro Baldarad — LV 5 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

It's the snake. This jerk, did he follow me all the way down here?! No, probably not. It's the same level as the other one, but it's probably not the same individual. Yiiikes. Is this the habitat of these super-strong boss-class monsters? With my body as wounded as it is, I am definitely not looking for a fight.

The snake slowly approaches the fallen wasp. Please, I beg of you, take the wasp and leave me alone!! The snake, however, didn't do anything to the wasp. Rather, it *couldn't* do anything.

With blinding speed, something tears the snake apart.

Uh? Are my eyes working okay? That snake, unless I'm completely mistaken, was shredded into scrap as if it were made of paper. That snake, which was supposed to be protected by its impenetrable scales. That snake, whose speed rivals even my own, was erased before it even had time to react.

Alaba, the Earth Dragon — LV 31 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

It stands, proudly and calmly. Its name might be "dragon", but its form is really closer to that of a wolf. It walks on four legs. Its tail is long. It has no wings. Even still, with its majestic bearing, it's impossible not to see it as a dragon.

Not good. My instincts as a spider, my reason as a person, everything is screaming at me in unison: this thing is absolutely terrible news. I have zero chance against it. Forget winning or losing, this thing is so out of my league that I shouldn't even bother. If it looks at me, I don't think it would see me as anything but fodder. I'm not even prey. If it sees me, I will become food. That's how far above me that thing is.

Oh, it might have a high level, but that's the least of my problems. No matter how you look at it, that thing is extremely terrible news.

The Earth Dragon, Alaba, starts to slowly devour the scattered pieces of the snake. Panicking, I try to still my breath.

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2."

Ah!! Shut up! Please! Shh!! What are you going to do if it spots me?!

Alaba, the Earth Dragon, finishes devouring the snake and leaves, not even sparing a glance for my wasp.

Ph... phew. I don't know if it completely overlooked me, or if it just decided I wasn't even worth the effort, but, phew, I'm safe for now.

I'm no stranger to life-and-death situations by now, but this is the most terrifyingly close to death I have ever come. I'm still trembling just thinking about it.

This isn't good. If there's something that powerful lurking in this area, I should be doing everything I can to get far away from here.

I check my surroundings. Right now, I'm at the bottom of the huge shaft I fell down a little while ago. I'd estimate that the shaft is about a hundred meters in diameter, and its depth... is probably way more than that, huh. I really have no way to tell; the huge swarm of wasps buzzing overhead is like an impenetrable wall.

I'm glad that Appraisal didn't activate at this range. If it did, the headache from the sheer number of Appraisal results would knock me straight out. If I want to go back the way I came, I'm going to need to get through that swarm. And, on top of that, climb up the cliff.

That's impossible. If I'm clinging to the wall, I can't fight. I won't be able to move quickly, and I won't be able to aim my thread. That's a zone where all of my most reliable strengths are sealed away. The wasps certainly will have no trouble with their mobility, flying through the air. There's no way for me to win.

Even still, with a monster like *that* lurking around, exploration is basically suicide. There are a bunch of passageways connected to the base of this pit... if it really came down to it, could I maybe try going down a different one? Nope. With a wound like this, even if I didn't encounter another ludicrous monster like that, I'd still be toast even if I found just a regular monster.

This is bad. This might be checkmate.

37 Struggling

I waited a good, long while after the Earth Dragon left, constantly keeping an over-watchful eye on my surroundings. There's no way I can relax, just with that. If I don't do *something*, though, it's no use.

I turn towards the wasp that I left tied up over there and extend a thread towards it with Thread Manipulation. Agh, that hurt my back. It doesn't look like I have any problems spinning thread, though. I carefully maneuver the thread out there, and tie it to the wasp.

The wasp is still struggling, but it really doesn't matter. What does matter is that I need to get this thing pulled in before it attracts the attention of another monster. Every time I pull on the thread, my wound aches. The pain is serious, but my health isn't going down at all, so I'm telling myself that this is fine.

Finally, I've retrieved the wasp. I quickly seize it in my Poison Fangs, and clamp down tightly until it stops moving. Hmm, when I think about how effective Poison Fang is on other poison-using monsters, I wonder if I've overleveled both it and Poison Resistance, compared to other monsters? Eh, for now, whatever works is good.

The real problem is what to do next. Frankly, I think exploring this area is basically suicide. If there's anything else out there that's as strong as that Earth Dragon, there is literally zero way that I will survive.

This is real bad. I've crossed many dangerous bridges before, but nothing like this.

You know, maybe I've been a little bit conceited about my combat abilities. Sure, I've been successful with my various sneak-attack strategies as I've been loitering around this dungeon, but my real strength is fighting defensively from within my nest. Even one of my simple homes was able to take down one of those snakes, so if I were to actually put my full efforts into it, I don't think there's a single monster out there that could get through to me. ...Probably.

...well, THAT thing can probably break through. While whistling a jaunty tune, even. It is, at the very least, that powerful.

Silk, poison fangs, sneak attacks, and speed. All of my specialties are nothing more than clever tricks in front of that thing, tricks that are kicked aside by its overwhelming power. This is the second completely undefeatable monster that I've encountered in my brief life as a spider. The first, by the way, was my mother (father?), the giant spider.

Not being able to win definitely a problem, but way, way worse is the fact that its speed vastly outpaces mine. Usually, if something can break through my nest, I can run away while it's doing so. I may seethe with rage, but I will make it out with my life, thanks to my speed. That thing, however, could catch me.

I can't win if I fight it, and I can't escape if I run away. If I catch its eye, it's all over.

Man, what an unreasonable monster. If I'd known about this, I would have tried facing that other snake's charge instead. At least I'd have a chance then. On top of that, I don't even know if that thing is the only one of its kind down here!

I'm scared. This is the closest I've ever been to death. I'm almost a little surprised that I'm feeling so afraid. I've been through so much ridiculous stuff so far, and I never really felt much fear or nervousness. I thought that maybe I'd mastered those feelings already. Now, though, I know. All the dangers so far have merely not been dangerous enough to make me scared. It's not that I can't feel fear, it's that I didn't need to.

Ha, ha. It's way too late for me to be realizing this. I wish I'd figured this out sooner. If I had, maybe I'd have been a little more aware of how dangerous things could be.

Okay, I think that's enough regretting. Let's figure out how I might survive this.

Step one is securing my safety. It's not going to be much help against the Earth Dragon, but for now I should set up a nest in these crags. Right now, I don't think I'm in any condition to move anywhere else. You could even say I just don't want to leave. So, I'm going to build my home, number three, right here.

Then, if I can, I'm going to lure wasps and other strong monsters in here so that I can kill them. My goal is to level up and get that full heal. Until I fix this wound in my back, there's not much I can do. If any monster, even a weak one, so much as sneezes on me, I'm dead. I really don't want to bank on recovering on my own. Man, I wish I'd picked up Automatic HP Recovery back when I had the chance. Regrets won't fix anything, though; I need to accept my mistakes and move on.

For now, let's focus on getting my base set up. Honestly, this isn't a very good place for a base. It's going to stand out a ton and, of course, if I'm noticed by a monster like that Earth Dragon, I'm toast. With these wounds, though, I don't have much choice. This really comes down to luck. Bad luck.

Okay, my plan is to level up. Once I've fixed this wound, I think I'll be able to get out of this danger zone.

Hmm, do I go up and try to break through the wasp army, or do I stay down here and explore this extremely dangerous area? Either way, it's hell. Man, now that I've fallen down here, I've got the ultimate life-or-death choice in front of me. If I'm lucky, I live, if I'm unlucky, I die. The scales are tipped pretty far towards "die" right now, though. Is it going to keep tipping this way, or can I make it recover?

I need to take action to swing the scales my way. Luckily, I've got enough stamina left to weave a decent nest. This wasp is pretty big, so it'll be a solid meal. Let's extract all the stamina I can from this thing and turn it all into an awesome nest. Everything after that is down to luck and skill.

38 Spider vs. Wasp (1)

On the first day, I made the simplest workable nest and went to sleep. I can't really say I slept well, thanks to this backache, but the important part is that I didn't get attacked overnight, which is a huge relief. Even better, I didn't die from my injuries overnight! I breathed a huge sigh of relief when I woke up. After checking my health level, it looked like nothing changed; I was still at six HP. I'm kind of disappointed that it's not recovering on its own, but I'm still happy it didn't go down, either... well, could be better, could be worse.

On the second day, I devoted basically the entire day to expanding and fortifying my nest. My back was still hurting, but I focused on my task and fought through it. Wasps were buzzing around me a ton, but whenever they came close, I stopped working and kept a watchful eye on them. I'm not used to working under these conditions; constantly being vigilant while I work is really nerve-wracking.

I took whatever spare moments I had to work on nibbling away at that wasp from earlier, so I can keep my stamina up. In this situation, if I run out of stamina, the scales will absolutely tip further towards my defeat. I am extremely dependent on my stamina. Weaving threads relies heavily on my stamina, not to mention my other day-to-day activities. On top of that, I need to make sure I save enough stamina for at least one battle. I don't know how easily I'll be able to secure more food after I finish this wasp, so since I've committed to this siege-defense strategy, I need to take extra special care of my stamina.

Also on day two, I realized that the level of Pain Resistance had gone way up. If I'm remembering correctly, the last time it leveled up it hit level two, but while I was working on building the nest the "Voice of Heaven" chimed in,

"Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Pain Resistance (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7."

So, it jumped straight to level seven. I don't have any solid idea why, but if I had to take a guess, I'd say it probably happened while I was asleep. If proficiency in that goes up when you're in pain, then it makes a ton of sense that it would have gained a bunch of levels while I was sleeping, what with how miserable I was last night and all. If I think back, maybe I did hear the "Voice of Heaven" say something while I was half-asleep.

Well, now that I know it's level seven, it seems pretty obvious that Pain Resistance isn't actually a skill that alleviates pain; if it was, it would be really strange if I was still hurting this bad at level seven. If I had to take a guess, I'd probably say... it lets me endure pain well enough to keep moving. Honestly, could be better, could be worse. This still hurts a ton, and there still is a limit to how much I can move with these wounds. When I first got this skill, I remember feeling like my pain had immediately gotten better, but maybe that was all in my head.

Before the day was out, Pain Resistance made it up to level eight.

* * *

Day three. I've completely consumed the wasp I dragged in a few days ago. My nest is about as good as it's going to get, in these conditions, so it's time to move onto stage two: namely, hunting until I level up.

There's a problem, though... how am I going to catch anything? These wasps keep coming close, and I know they know I'm here, but none of them are swooping in to attack. I was really expecting them to throw themselves at me without a plan, but I guess I'm not that lucky.

Well, for now, I should keep an eye on the wasps and wait for a good chance to strike. I tried provoking a few of the ones that came near, but nobody took the bait.

From my observations, I've learned a few things about these wasps. It looks like they mostly fly around in groups of about five or six, acting independently of each other. Each group has a leader:

High Finjgoat — LV 1 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

A "High" Finjgoat, huh. Its name implies some sort of superiority, so maybe these are individuals that have evolved. Since they're level one, that seems pretty likely to me. I also see wasps flying around that are levels eight or nine, right on the verge of evolving; when they do, they'll probably become leaders as well.

The boss wasps are slightly darker-colored than the regular wasps. That's basically the only difference; their size and shape are basically the same. Appraisal can't seem to manage to get the stats on these things, but I'd bet that they're stronger than the ordinary wasps.

Well, I don't think that even those guys can break through my nest. I think they know it too, which might explain why they're not attacking me when I'm provoking them. Man, if that's true, these guys are way smart.

Every so often, an entire group will disappear down one of the corridors at the bottom of the pit; after a while, they'll come back, bearing fresh prey. Man, those squads look like super-efficient. They really are intelligent! There are a few that wander around aimlessly by themselves, though.

You know what's great, though? There's monsters down here that these wasps are able to hunt. Every thing down here is not, after all, as tough as that Earth Dragon! Things are really starting to look up for me, now that I know that.

There are, however, groups that don't make it back, so I shouldn't get too careless. After all, a group that doesn't come back is almost undoubtedly a group that got wiped out before it could make it back. Even some of the successful groups come back bearing their fellow soldiers' corpses, so I definitely shouldn't stop thinking of this as a dangerous kind of area.

Unblinkingly, I continue observing the wasps.

39 Spider vs. Wasp (2)

At the end of the third day, just as I was starting to think about going to sleep, the “Voice of Heaven” came down from above.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Pain Resistance (LV 9)] has become [Ignore Pain], and a new skill, [Pain Tolerance (LV 1)] has been unlocked.”

Pain Resistance went up again, huh... and it had already leveled from eight to nine without me noticing, probably when I was sleeping again. The level number disappeared, and the name changed to “Ignore Pain”. Feels like it capped out. That gives me two max-level skills, next to Night Vision. I think I started out with a high level in Night Vision already, though, thanks to my natural-born abilities, so Ignore Pain is the first skill I’ve raised all the way up from zero to ten by myself! I don’t really feel like celebrating, though, because grinding that out was literally suffering.

Well, it looks like the skill I just unlocked is the actual “pain hurts less” skill. Ah, no, I’m not saying that Pain Resistance was a rip-off or anything, just that it wasn’t what I was expecting. The new skill is only level one right now, so I’m not feeling much of an effect. As always, my back is rather rudely reminding me how badly it’s still wounded. I’m hoping it’ll be a little more polite about it once I get a few levels of Pain Tolerance, and I’m really hoping that it’ll level up overnight.

Well then, good night!

* * *

Day Four. My stamina has started to steadily fall, so it’s time to take action. My target are the lone wasps that drift away from the swarm. Trying to get an entire squad of wasps is too risky. I think I could beat them, sure, but I need to be cautious: since there’s a bunch of wasps in a squad, it’s not impossible that they’ll do something completely unexpected.

So, snagging one of the loners is probably my best bet. It looks like they’re not quite as smart when they’re not being ordered around by a commander. While I was observing them yesterday, I saw a lone wasp fly through a tiny tunnel that a squad definitely couldn’t fit through. I’d bet that the wasp I caught a while ago had done something similar, going down a strange passage, getting lost, and eventually winding up in my webs. Hmm, that was a long time ago, though, and really far away; it’s really unlikely that the wasp from back then came from this swarm. Maybe there’s another hive somewhere else?

From what I’ve been seeing so far, the ones that wander off are already not very bright. Maybe that’s why they never joined a squad and were content with wandering off? Ah, regardless, the point is, if I provoke one of the strays, it might be dumb enough to come and attack.

I’d never rely on such an uncertain strategy, though... not when I have the new secret weapon I developed yesterday!

It’s a hardened sphere of sticky silk at the end of a long cord. I call it: the Silken Smasher¹⁵! Eheheh. With my raw physical strength plus the power of Thread Manipulation, I’ll be able to strike those wasps out of the sky! ...Probably. It’s, uh, worth noting that I’m probably going to miss with this, nine times out of ten. But that’s okay! All I’m really trying to do is get these things to realize that I’m an enemy, and come charging at

¹⁵ The Japanese word for spider is “kumo”, so the author used the portmanteau “kumorningstar”. Alas, I could not come up with a way to smash the word “spider” (or “silk” or “thread”) into “morningstar” without making the base word, morningstar, unrecognizable. So, in the grand tradition of manga translators coming up with unnecessarily cool names for special attacks, I’m calling it a “Silken Smasher”.

me of its own accord. If I get super lucky and hit it directly, then my target will be immediately trapped, which is my victory anyway.

Now, I just have to wait for the perfect chance, for one of the loner wasps to come close enough to my nest. If today is anything like yesterday, a bunch of them will be buzzing by to get a closer look at my web, so everything should go as planned.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Pain Tolerance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

As I waited, Pain Tolerance leveled up again. Huh? Compared to Pain Resistance, this is leveling up super slowly! I was really expecting it to go up to about level five while I was asleep, but it only went up to two... hmm? I wonder if the way I accumulate proficiency is different? Or maybe, is the amount of proficiency I need to accumulate different? Ahhh, I don't know.

Although, that level up made this extremely obvious: Pain Tolerance is, in fact, a skill that dulls pain. Thanks to my new skill level, my back is feeling much better.

The wound on my back is a severe one. I did my best to bandage it up with Thread Manipulation, but this is seriously a gaping hole. If I was a human, this would absolutely have killed me. I wonder, am I still alive because I'm a spider, or because I'm a monster? Regardless, it is a miracle that I'm alive with a wound this bad. I wanted to make sure no more poison was left in the wound, so I tried cleaning it out with Thread Manipulation. This hurt so bad I thought I was going to die.

I have to level up as quickly as I can, to fix this wound. If I leave it as it is, it's only going to get worse from here. It could fester, it could get necrotic, it could get infected... I cleaned it out with silk, but it's nowhere near as good as washing it with clean water, let alone actually disinfecting it. I really need to do something before my symptoms get worse.

And, just like that, a chance appears.

A single loner wasp makes its way over here. There's no other wasps nearby! If there were, they'd probably come rushing to protect their comrade once he got into trouble. This situation is perfect: I don't have to worry about that at all.

I ready the Silken Smasher. Focus... focus... aaaaaaim... THERE!

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Concentration (LV 1)].”

Oh, it hit. And it seems like I got a skill at the same time.

Oh, man, I did not think that would hit at all. The Silken Smasher hit it dead on! Using Thread Manipulation, I unravel it and use the thread to wrap up the captured wasp. I drag the violently struggling bundle back into my nest, and it falls prey to my poison fangs.

Whoa. A perfect success on my very first try. This is a great omen! Ah, no, no, I am not going to let myself get cocky again. We all know what happened last time I did. Now, I walk with humility. Well then, let's celebrate this important first step with this long-awaited meal. Let's dig in!

40 Spider vs. Wasp (3)

For now, I've secured a source of food. This wasp is big enough that I'll be able to stave off starvation for another few days, so I don't need to worry about my stamina at all. I have way more options available to me now.

Most realistically, I should keep doing the same thing, doing this small-scale hunting thing until my level goes up. I can eke out a safe, honest living that way, not taking any unnecessary risks.

I had another idea, though: work on expanding my nest. Upward.

Exploring this floor warrants a big fat "nope". It's not a question can or can't. Nnnnooooope! That dragon's too scary. Nooooo can do.

So, if that's my plan, creeping my way up this wall will let me get back to the tunnels from before. In order to do that, I'm going to need some way to avoid all of those wasps. If I were to just climb up as-is, those wasps would eat me alive! I need some sort of countermeasure.

I've thought about it somewhat, and my best plan so far is somehow extending my nest vertically. It's less a plan and more of an application of brute force... ah, and what a blatant use of force it is. Really, though, it's all I've been able to come up with so far.

There are, of course, problems. First of all, weaving a nest like that is going to burn through all of my stamina. I've never tried to build a nest up a wall before! I have no idea how much more stamina it'll take than usual. This is a seriously huge project, and the stamina from the single wasp I've caught so far isn't going to last me very long at all. I'm going to have to replenish it, somehow.

On top of that, there is an excellent chance that I'm going to have to fight a bunch of wasps. Down here, they're overlooking me, but if I start to encroach on their domain up above, they're going to have problems with that. A violation of sovereign airspace. I wonder if they'll be able to overlook that... The absolute worst case scenario is that hundreds, no, thousands of bees will all swarm in and attack me at once. This would be a straight-up nightmare; there's no way my nest could withstand an attack of that magnitude.

I shouldn't just be worried about the wasps, either. There haven't been many other monsters that have come wandering into this pit, other than the snake and the Earth Dragon from before. If that dragon were to wander in here, though... Last time, I escaped by hiding in these crags, but if I start extending my nest it is going to stick out like a sore thumb, and if the dragon takes notice... I'm dead. Even after all this time, I'm terrified that the Earth Dragon is going to appear at any second.

So, if this works, I can finally get out of this mega-danger zone, but there are some serious risks involved. I really don't have a better plan, either. There could be one, but I certainly haven't thought of it.

So, then. Commence the preparations for nest extension!

First up is the foundation. When building a house, you must start with a sturdy foundation, after all; it's not a stretch at all to say that the quality of a house is decided by the quality of its foundation. And, here's a good, sturdy rock!

It's the first rock that I took shelter behind. It is seriously huge, about seven meters high and five meters wide, sitting slightly away from the wall. I'll use that one as the foundation, so I'll start expanding my nest over that way.

What I've got so far is a web connecting one side of the rock to the wall, with a little horizontal bit jutting out. First, I need to link the other side of the rock to the wall and web that up. Next up is a diagonal thread that connects the top of the rock to the wall... then, using that as a base, connect it to my other walls. With this, my foundation is complete!

Now, it's time to try to expand things up a little bit. I snack on the wasp to get my stamina back up, then get back to work. While I'm working, I notice a few wasps silently watching me, but, as expected, they don't approach. Looks like I'm still far enough down that they'll keep overlooking me.

I wrap up my work for the day, finish eating up the wasp, and call it a night.

Day Five. It feels like my back is a little less sore than before. My health is, of course, still six. Since the wound hasn't gotten any better, I guess my Pain Tolerance skill leveled up again while I was sleeping. Probably.

It's really great that the pain's going away. I've still been able to move around without any trouble thanks to Ignore Pain, but there's a night-and-day difference in my mood now that I'm not hurting any more. Ah, no, the pain hasn't gone away completely, and the wound still isn't cured, but this is way nicer. I never had a wound nearly this bad when I was a human. The worst pain I can remember was stubbing my pinky toe on the doorframe. That really hurt, but it doesn't even begin to compare to having a huge, gaping wound opened up in my back.

Thanks to my elevated spirits, work goes great!

As I'm working, one of the loner wasps buzzes over. There's a full squad nearby, though. Umf...

Now's a pretty good opportunity to run a little experiment, so I think I'll provoke this loner wasp. If I threaten the loner, will the squad react? If they do, I can immediately escape deep into my nest. If they don't, I can do it like I did before

I ready a Silken Smasher. Oh, yeah, didn't I pick up a Concentration skill last time I did this? What does that do, just increase my ability to focus? ...Eh, it's level one, so the effects aren't going to be huge, so I'll just leave it be for now.

Wait, no, concentrate, concentrate. Heh, thinking about Concentration ruined my concentration. Aim caaaaarefully... there!!

Ah, it hit.

Wha, what?! I'm awesome, aren't I? I was thinking "oh man there's no way this is gonna hit, heh" and then I got a direct hit two out of two times! Me, who consistently ranked lowest in the class for physical strength; me, who could barely even throw a softball...

Uh, whoops, in my surprise I completely forgot to keep track of that squad. They are... oh, there they are! Umf, no reaction at all. Man, can I really attack these loners without facing a counterattack? That's really heartless, you know, guys? Or maybe this is just how severe life in the wild is. Well, regardless, either way this is great for me. I can pick off the loners at my leisure.

Chuckling happily to myself, I bring the captured wasp back into my lair, and finish it off with Poison Fang.

S5 Gem of Appraisal

Today is the long-awaited day where I finally get my stats checked with the Gem of Appraisal. There are stats in this world. I can't say that I haven't wondered why that is, since this is reality and not a game, but I've given up on looking for the answer. The explanation is pretty simple: that's just how this world is.

Yes, a simple explanation. This world really is very much like a game. If you work hard enough, you'll earn a reward, just like that. Sure, there seem to be differences in raw talent, but if I compare it to Earth, this really does seem to be a world where your efforts are acknowledged far more easily. At any rate, these rewards come in the form of things called "skills".

To earn a skill, you must perform actions that match what that skill does. As you do so, you accumulate a number of "proficiency points", and when you've earned enough of those, you earn the skill. Once you've earned it, you can start using it immediately. On top of that, if you keep using the skill, you keep earning more proficiency points, until you pass a certain threshold and the skill's level increases. The harder you work on it, the better it gets. There's no such thing as an effort gone to waste! Truly, this is a magnificent world.

Ever since I was born, Anna and Clevea have been tutoring me, so by now I've picked up quite a few skills. The more I did, the more I got out of it, and I got swept away by the thrill of greedily acquiring skill after skill. Sue has always been by my side, mimicking me, and has picked up a lot of skills herself. Sometimes, we overdo it, and Anna and Clevea get angry, but they do it out of love.

In a game, more strength equals more fun. There are other players that like to pace themselves, but I always try to get as strong as I can as fast as I can. This is doubly true now that I'm not just leveling a game character, I'm working on strengthening my own self.

It's all well and good to work on getting stronger, but there's one inconvenient thing about this world: I have no way to check my stats. This world definitely has the concept of an individual's statistics, but trying to see them is extremely difficult.

To do so, you need a skill called "Appraisal". If you have that skill, you can use it to see someone's statistics, but there are few humans in the world who can use it. In order to start building proficiency points, you must first build a deep understanding of what makes something valuable and a sense of what materials things are made of, much like an appraiser does back on Earth. The level of technical skill required is far beyond what a novice can muster. Even if you can somehow acquire the skill, raising its level is an extremely difficult task, so there are very few humans out there who can truly use it.

It's not impossible, though, if you just want to easily acquire the skill. If you have any of these things called "skill points", you can spend them in order to acquire a skill directly. Even a skill as difficult as Appraisal can be acquired, as long as you have enough skill points to spend. Even if you do so, though, you can't really go very much further.

To level Appraisal, you have to use it. Using it grants you proficiency points, and, once you've accumulated enough, the level goes up. However, activating Appraisal is actually pretty hard on your mind.

Appraisal requires neither magic nor willpower to activate. It's definitely wrong to say, though, that you can activate it as much as you want. If you fall into that trap, you'll be assaulted by severe headaches and a sort of intoxicated feeling. The limit varies from person to person, but apparently there are people who can't even use it once without falling ill. Even if you're talented, trying to appraise two things at a time will leave you ill, with a crippling headache.

Since just activating it once could cause such serious effects, activating it over and over again in order to grind out your skill proficiency would carry a terrible cost. And, on top of all that, if you don't get it up to a high enough level, it's effectively useless. Thanks to that, there aren't very many people alive who can use Appraisal effectively. Apparently, it's a profession that's passed down from parent to child.

So, to solve the problem of people still needing to be able to check their stats, this thing called a Gem of Appraisal was introduced. If you can acquire one of these rare, specially-crafted magic items, you can temporarily use Appraisal as if you had the skill yourself. The skill level varies depending on the quality of the Gem, and the one owned by the royal family is, naturally, beyond compare: it's level ten, a level that no other stone in the world can match. Of course, its use requires special permission, so it's really only the royal family and their most valued friends amongst the high-ranking nobility.

Since I'm a member of the royal family, using it will be no problem. However, even though I'm a prince, I can't just use it whenever I want. No matter how many tantrums I threw to try to convince Anna, she was very insistent: you can't get permission until you're old enough. Of course, once you're old enough to appraise your statistics the first time, it's treated as a special event. Even if you're merely a noble, there are still rites to be held, a majestic ceremony for a child's first Appraisal. I, of course, still have to go through with this ceremony.

These ceremonies are not just for Appraisal: they also serve as the child's first appearance before the nobility. The Appraisal results are displayed such that all of the gathered adults can see them as well. I don't think it will be a problem that my skills are atypical for someone my age, but I'm a little terrified that my stats will be so low that my family will abandon me.

In any event, Sue and I are making our grand debut here. We've been dressed in our ceremonial children's clothes, and have been drilled endlessly on the ceremonial rites. In attendance will be the current King; that is, our father. Even more, it looks like there's someone especially important in attendance, so it is extremely crucial that we don't mess up at all. Even if we're children, we are members of the royal family. We are the stars of this occasion, so we must present ourselves all of the dignity and grace that is expected of the royal family. This is a lot to ask of me; I used to be a lowly commoner in my previous life. However, when I saw how magnificently my little sister was standing beside me, I was filled with determination. I must do this.

"Are you ready, my Prince?" asks Anna, solemnly. I silently nod. "Then, after you."

Anna pushes lightly at our backs, and Sue and I enter, side by side, into the assembly hall.

Author note: Because it became unexpectedly long, I'll cut it here. Continues in S6.

41 Finally, the level up I've been praying for!

After killing a few more lone wasps, I finally heard that voice.

“Experience requirements met. Small Taratekt, you have grown from level 2 to level 3. Every ability score has been increased. Acquired bonus skill proficiencies from leveling up: your skill [Strength (LV 1)] skill has been raised to level 2, your skill [Toughness (LV 1)] skill has been raised to level 2, and your skill [Overeating (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2. You have acquired additional skill points.”

The level up that I've been waiting for all this time comes at me in an instant! My skin rustles as it peels away from my body. Somehow, although I can't really describe how, I can feel that the wound on my back has closed completely.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Automatic HP Recovery (LV 1)].”

...Huh? Really? Ohh! Now this is a surprise. So, uh, does this mean that my full-heal on level up is a kind of automatic recovery? I am extremely, unbelievably happy about this, but, man, I really could have used this earlier... My life wouldn't have been nearly this hard if I'd had such luxuries available to me.

No, I shouldn't be complaining. This really is luxurious! My anxieties about if I would ever level up have vanished. This is when I should be smiling thankfully.

Seriously, though, things had gotten pretty dangerous. My health, which had been stuck at six for a while, went down to five on its own, so I got seriously worried about my continued existence. It kept going down, too, and by the time I leveled up it was all the way down to three. Seriously dangerous. I clamped down on my anxious heart, and threw everything I had into hunting stray wasps.

Hunting the loners was remarkably easy, though! Unlike what I'd expected at first, my accuracy with the Silken Smasher has been one hundred percent. This was a serious surprise, you knooow! Is this another thing that spiders can just do naturally? Regardless, on top of that, I picked up my first level in both [Throw] and [Aiming]! Both of these are probably skills that give me a passive bonus, I think.

And on top of all that, I got three bonus skill levels when I leveled this time! I don't know what any of them actually do, but since I've somehow accumulated some skill proficiency, I've probably been benefiting from them unconsciously. I don't... think... there's any downsides to this... probably. I'm a little bit concerned about Overeating, though...

Thanks to all the web-weaving and wasp-hunting I've been doing, my silk-related skills have gone up quite a bit, too! My Spider Silk is now at level eight, and Thread Manipulation is up to level five. Thread Manipulation is way more useful than I thought it was gonna be. Now that it's level five, its accuracy and speed have gone up quite a bit. Picking this up was absolutely the right choice.

Pain Tolerance also hit level five, so my back was actually pretty comfortable. This skill is pretty awesome; it alleviates pain, but it leaves enough feeling that you have a sense of how bad your injuries are. Pain is a great indicator of danger, so feeling it is actually pretty important. If it disappears entirely, you'll have no idea of how dangerous any of your injuries are. This skill, though, still gives me that sense of danger, despite taking the pain away. It's hard to describe... wounds have a sense of... uneasiness about them, I guess, that is distinctly different from actual pain. So, taking away the pain isn't a problem at all. Ah, well, it's only level five, so it's not like it gets rid of it completely.

Well then! I leveled up after all this time, so let's check out my new stats!

Small Taratekt — LV 3 — (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 38/38 (green)

MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 38/38 (yellow), 38/38 (red)

Avg. Offense: 21

Avg. Defense: 21

Avg. Magic Power: 19

Avg. Resistance: 19

Avg. Speed: 369

Oh ho! All three meters went up by two, as did Offense and Defense, and Magic Power and Resistance went up by one. But uh, hey, Speed, what are you doing? I remember you being 348 before, and then you gained... twenty one points...? Isn't that a little weird? The other stats were a little more reserved about it... aren't you trying a little too hard? ...Offense, Defense, why did you go up the same amount? You're leaving Magic Power and Resistance in the dust, you know... Uuuuunbelievable...

Ah, well, I'm going to have to ignore my unbalanced stats for now. Gotta focus on the present.

At long last, I've leveled up and regained all of my health, so now I can focus my full efforts on getting out of here. With my injuries as bad as they were, my work was slower than I would have liked; plus, I had to be extra cautious. From now, on, though, I'm going to keep hunting the loner wasps for stamina while extending my nest higher and higher.

By now, I've made it about one quarter of the way to my goal at the top. I've still got a loooong ways to go. So far the wasps haven't been aggressive or even just intimidating. I have no idea how long that's going to last, though, so I need to make sure I'm still building this strong enough to withstand attack. This is crucial... but man, it's way hard. Unlike building a regular nest at ground level, this climbing nest is super challenging! The higher I go, the harder it gets. I keep having to run a thick support thread from the foundation rock to the wall above me, and then I have to bind it tightly to the rest of the structure. I'm only a quarter of the way there, and this work is getting harder and harder as I climb.

I've got no choice, though, I have to do it. I have no idea if or when that Earth Dragon is going to show back up here. What I do know is that I want to be far, far away from here when it does happen. Worst case scenario, I have to abandon my nest halfway through and just charge straight up as fast as I can and hope for the best. This is, of course, extremely dangerous... but if I stay down here, my death is inevitable. So, until then, I'm going to keep building this web higher and higher. I absolutely do not want to stay down here.

42 Spider vs. Wasp (4)

Ah, is it finally happening?

Finjegoat — LV 6 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Finjegoat — LV 4 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Finjegoat — LV 5 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Finjegoat — LV 5 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

High Finjegoat — LV 1 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Hovering in the sky before my eyes is a squadron of wasps, and they sure don't look like they're just here to watch. They're giving off an atmosphere of hostility, like they've finally seen me as a threat and are here to settle things.

My nest stretches up about halfway to my goal. As I've been building higher and higher, the wasp's attitudes have been changing bit by bit, but it looks like I finally hit a point where they just can't leave me alone anymore.

But still, they just sent one squadron. Are they not taking me seriously, or are they just testing the waters? Regardless, in my nest I can totally win against just one squad.

I ready my Silken Smasher. I've been building the walls of this nest out of a fine mesh, but I've left cracks for me to throw my weapons out of. Of course, even though there's cracks, it's not like they're big enough for those two-meter-long wasps are going to be able to get through them. My foes have no way to get through to me, but I can attack outside as much as I want. Well, they can always run away, though, so it's really more of a tie.

The two level fives rush in to assault my nest. Heh. Even when there's two of them attacking simultaneously, my nest doesn't even budge. My Spider Silk skill is level eight! Even when it was low-leveled, my silk was something I was proud of, and now that it's this high-level, it's only gotten better. Just like that, it was able to withstand two of those wasps directly charging into it, without moving an inch! Even though they came at me with their impressive bulk and their great speed, there was literally no damage at all. It literally didn't even shudder from the impact.

The threads I've surrounded my nest with are maximally strong, with just enough rubbery elasticity to be excellent shock absorbers. I designed it so that the threads can expand and contract somewhat, in order to absorb a certain amount of shock. Two wasps ramming into it head-on did nothing! It can absorb at least that amount. If it couldn't, then I'd have to rely solely on the raw strength of the threads to keep things together.

It's not like those wasps' attacks are particularly weak, or anything. From my observations, these wasps are, hm, how do I say it... strong. They drag all sorts of prey back here, including those huge snakes!

They can attack unopposed from the air, with their poisoned stingers and powerful physiques. Under any normal circumstances, they would be a huge threat! No ordinary attacks can reach them when they're in the air, so they can attack without fear of reprisal. Ah, hm, this might be why they seem so weak to my anti-air attacks. My perfect accuracy with the Silken Smasher may be because they just simply aren't expecting anything to hit them!

Thanks to all that, an ordinary battle with these wasps would be extremely difficult. Yes, an ordinary battle. My home, my trump card, is not, however, ordinary. It possesses extraordinary resilience, extraordinary binding power, and extraordinary siege potential! I'll bet these wasps haven't ever seen any tactics like these. This is, after all, what happens when a spider's strongest trump card is wielded by a human's powerful intellect.

For now, I'll ignore the two wasps that got stuck in my nest after they body-checked it. I turn to the remaining three wasps, who still haven't grasped the severity of their situation, and hurl my Silken Smasher! Their leader is completely unable to avoid it, and takes it full on. This was my goal all along. I crack my thread like a whip, and the centrifugal force slams my foe down into my nest. The leader has been neutralized.

The remaining two wasps panic, not knowing what to do now that their leader's been taken out. Perfect targets. I fling out the Silken Smasher yet again and dispatch the higher-level one. After that, the remaining wasp gets its head together, but its next move is awful. I don't know if it was expecting a turnabout, but it charges straight at me! Didn't you learn anything from the other two that tried that? Well, unfortunately, that desperate attack completely fails to reach me, and there's one more wasp stuck in my webs.

It was over too quickly. The wasps I thought were so dreadful and terrible when I first fell down here have no strategy to deal with me once I've built a nest! If it can withstand a straight-on charge without even shuddering, then no matter how many wasps may attack, they'll never reach me! This alone is proof of the ridiculous defensive strength of my nest.

In a video game, if your defense stats are high enough, attacks from weaker characters won't deal you any damage at all. It looks like that's holding true for my nest against those wasps. I had imagined that the wasps wouldn't be able to break through, but I was figuring that they'd at least do enough damage that I'd have to do some maintenance every once in a while.

There are still hundreds of pathetic little wasps buzzing around above me. I remember the terror I felt when I first realized how many there were... but, now that I have my indestructible nest, it's an entirely different story. It doesn't matter if you bring hundreds, or even thousands, if you cannot break through my webs, your stingers shall never reach me!

My chances of escape are looking better and better. In an excellent mood, I finish off these captured wasps and get back to work.

43 Spider vs. Earth Dragon.....eh?

After my successful defeat of the first squadron, the wasps started attacking continuously. I wiped out the second squad they sent at me without any trouble, but after that, things started getting a little hairy. They started sending multiple squads at once. No waaaaay! I mean, this is the right thing for the wasps to be doing, but, please look at it from my perspective! I don't want this many wasps to come! I'm still totally safe in my nest, but there's this constant feeling of pressure, you know! What am I supposed to do about all of these wasps constantly buzzing around me, day and night?

I sigh a little and look around me. Everywhere I look is wasps, wasps, wasps. Seriously, guys, what's up with you? With this many of you this close, your buzzing is no joke! You're seriously annoying! You're so loud I can't sleep!

On top of that, if I do manage to shoot all of you down, I can't eat that much! Sure, my Overeating skill might let me eat more than I could before, but even that is nearing its limit! I was complaining that one of these things was too huge, and then I got five more. Eating all that brought Overeating all the way up to level three, didn't it?

The worst part of this is that, while I'm being harassed by these wasps, work on my nest has stopped completely! My absolute top priority is escaping. Not dealing with wasps. But now, thanks to this unrelenting onslaught, my construction work can't continue. I'd really prefer if they stopped attacking and left me alone... I already have more than enough food. Well, it's not like they could understand that, anyway.

I really have no choice but to thread a little more work in between each attack. With the wasps being as vigilant as they are, leaving my nest is straight-up suicidal. The "charge straight to the top" plan I was thinking about before is definitely impossible. My speed may be 369, but I won't get anywhere that amount when I'm charging straight up a wall. If I run into any wasps on my way up, it's plain to see that I'll be stabbed straight to death.

Ahhhhh, son of a bitch! I really don't want to get slowed down like this! What happens if that Earth Dragon suddenly shows up? ...If that Earth Dragon... suddenly...

A tremendous chill runs down my spine.

Wh... what? Oh no, oh no, oh no no no no no no no no no no no no no no!!!! This isn't happening. This is not happening!! Ahhh, but it really is!!!

Alaba, the Earth Dragon — LV 31 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

The last guy I ever wanted to see has arrived. What's worse, it looks like he is quite interested in my nest.

Wh... what do I do?! Wait, no, what *can* I do? Nothing. I can't do anything. Not against an opponent like that. I have, basically, one option: pray with all of my heart that he is going to pass me by.

My prayers, however, are ripped to shreds.

The Earth Dragon opens its mouth. A dragon's greatest weapon is, without a doubt, its breath weapon.

A thunderous roar splits the air. A blast of pressure rips forth. A terrible vortex of destruction swallows everything in front of it.

What happened next, I'm not so sure about. It's pretty easy to put the pieces together, though. The big, sturdy rock I had used as the foundation for my nest simply vanishes, along with a huge chunk of the wall

behind it. An enormous crack runs up the wall above the blast site. Chunks of the wall start to rapidly break off; a literal cave-in. In a single blow, the bottom half of my nest was destroyed. The remaining top half was soon swallowed within the collapsing wall.

I was in the top half, spared from the direct effects of that breath weapon. I fell, surrounded by my broken webs, unable to do anything. I helplessly fall to the ground below. Oof. My health meter empties in an instant, but I'm still alive somehow. I'm alive, but I don't know for how long. Everything is up to the dragon, now.

I'm covered in layers of my own silk webbing. I'll get stuck it in if I touch the sticky parts, even though it's my own thread. That's really not a problem, though, not now. This might actually be lucky. If I'm covered in a pile of silk, the dragon might not be able to see me amongst the wreckage. He might even think I'm a rock, if I had to take a guess! If I just lie perfectly still, maybe he'll miss me entirely?

Seizing this faint hope, I hold my breath, and clamp down on the fear that trembles through my body.

“Proficiency requirements met. You have gained the skill [Fear Resistance (LV 1)].”

My trembling lessens by just a fraction, but I'm still scared. I am still quivering in abject terror! I'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scared i'm scaaaared!!

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 2)] has been raised to level 3.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Automatic HP Recovery (LV 1)] has been raised to level 2.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 3)] has been raised to level 4.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Stealth (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Fear Resistance (LV 4)] has been raised to level 5.”

* * *

The, ahah, “Voice of Heaven” pulls me back together. Or, maybe, it's the five levels of Fear Resistance that I earned while lying here trembling. I have no idea how long I've been hiding here. From the number of skill levels I got, it feels like forever. I check my stamina meter to see if I can tell how long it's been by how much it's gone down, but for whatever reason it's still at max.

I use Thread Manipulation to rip off the threads stuck to my body. From my earlier experimentation, I learned that I can use Thread Manipulation to change the properties of my silk somewhat, even after I've detached it from myself. Now, I decrease the adhesiveness and peel it back, slowly crawling out from under the pile of silk. The Earth Dragon is gone.

Oh man, I'm lucky.

44 Escape from Despair

I survived. I am grateful beyond belief. I'm alive. What an amazing thing to be.

As I think that, though, I can't stop faint feelings of despair from creeping in. What on earth am I going to do now?

My nest is gone. Completely, utterly, gone. I caught a fleeting glimpse on my way out of the destruction wreaked by that breath-like weapon.

There's an enormous crater in the wall where it once stood.

Ha ha. A crater in the wall, that's kinda weird! How did that even happen? Isn't a crater supposed to be something that happens when a meteorite or whatever crashes into the ground? What on earth could put a crater in a vertical surface? On top of that, didn't it have to blow through that huge rock too? Yeah, kinda weird.

Even when I was dazed and defenseless, the wasps didn't attack. Those guys are probably just as terrified of the Earth Dragon as I am. It's just that powerful of a being. Anyone would be terrified. Even I'm terrified.

Seriously, what do I do now? Breaking through the wasps and returning to my original tunnels is... possible. That's only if I disregard the Earth Dragon, though. This time, I survived through pure luck. Next time, though, I don't think I'll be anywhere near as lucky. Based on that thing's actions, it's clear that it recognized my nest as a particularly troublesome thing to deal with. Otherwise, there's no way it would let loose such a ridiculous attack. From here on out, whenever I build a nest, I need to acknowledge the high chance that the Earth Dragon is going to take offense.

So, I can't make a nest. Or, rather, I'm terrified, so I'm not going to. My spirit has been broken. I absolutely do not want to anger my superior, the Earth Dragon.

Maybe I'm wrong, maybe the Earth Dragon destroyed my nest on a whim, but I can't say that a creature that powerful would attack like it did without some level of thought behind it. It really doesn't matter either way, though, since I'm too weak to do anything about it. If I meet it, I will die. That's it.

Twice so far, I've been able to escape. Both of those times have been extremely lucky. I don't think it was entirely luck though. Even though that thing is monstrously powerful, it wasn't able to see me while I was hiding... right?

Yeah, I think so. I really want to think so. If I don't, I'll lose that last thin thread of hope I've been hanging on.

My single way to survive. If I keep myself absolutely hidden, I'll somehow be able to make it out of the Earth Dragon's territory. I've got no other options.

I'll need to rely on my Stealth skill. When I first got it, I didn't think it would help me all that much, but now it's my only lifeline. Its level is five, which is, quite honestly, not great, but I've got no other choice.

I focus my thoughts. First off, I have to figure out which direction the Earth Dragon went. I survey the ground around me, and notice that it's left splendidly clear footprints. They lead off away from me... in that direction, it looks like there's just one big tunnel. Back there, it seems, is where the Earth Dragon lurks. Just realizing that makes me nervous.

I should go down the path that points as far away from the Earth Dragon's as possible. That much is obvious. Who'd be so stupid as to aimlessly meander towards it? To be honest, though, I have no idea where this path may lead. Putting my fears aside, the best way to get out of here would be to try climbing again. Putting my feelings aside, I think it would really be my best chance for survival. Seriously, though, that's still impossible. I don't need to think about this one, I can feel it in my gut.

If I proceed slowly and keep myself hidden, I'll be able to move forward. Staying hidden will be hard... where's a cardboard box when you need one? Heh... Looks like my mood's recovering a little bit, huh?

Speaking of recovering, it looks like that huge pile of damage I took when I fell has already been healed, thanks to Automatic HP Recovery! Man, I really should have spent all of those skill points on this, instead of that worthless Detection skill. It's fantastic that I was able to acquire it on my own, though. I wonder how quickly I regenerate? I didn't really have the luxury of being able to watch my meters fill back up back then. It's still low-level, so I can't rely on it for rapid recovery, but I shouldn't need to be overly concerned about a few scrapes every now and then.

Ahhhh, I didn't really think about it much back then, but I did notice that my red Stamina bar wasn't going down at all! I wonder why that is? I've never noticed anything like this before... Maybe there's some sort of condition that stops it from decreasing, but I really have no idea what it could possibly be. ...I don't think this is the case, but... is this a bug? Is my stamina going down without the meter being updated? Ah, that would suuuck! I couldn't do anything if I suddenly ran out of stamina. Hey, Ms. Appraisal, I can believe in you, right? You're a can-do kinda girl, right? I trust you, but... with things like this... can I really believe in you?

I think Appraisal might level up soon. It's been a while since it last leveled, and I've been using it constantly since then. Since getting it up to level six made it a billion times more useful, I have really high hopes for level seven. I will be grateful beyond belief if it gives me a skill readout or anything like that. Having all of these skills I know nothing about is seriously inconvenient, you know! I might even have some skill hidden away that will turn this entire situation around! Even if I'm expecting too much of it, maybe there's something that will make things even just a little bit better.

Even the tiniest little advantage I can scrape together in order to get out of here would be amazing. What about a skill that gives me the location of all of the nearby enemies? If I had that, I could constantly be checking to make sure the Earth Dragon wasn't anywhere near me as I move forward. It would be great if I could use Detection like that, huh... I've given up hope on that by now, though.

I could really use a map, too! I don't know if this tunnel is going to lead me to a safe place or not. There's actually a pretty decent chance that this links directly up with another danger zone! If that happens, I'll probably die... right?

Well, for now, all I can really rely on is my own terrible luck. Please, if I may be so bold, let this passage bring me to somewhere safe!

45 The Depths of the Great Elro Labyrinth

This path I've been following is pretty big.

Well, it's got to be pretty big if those two-and-a-half meter wasps can fly about freely. Even that five-meter praying mantis can move freely, too!

Elro Greshgard — LV 3 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

A swarm of wasps are swarming around a giant praying mantis, who is slashing back at them with the giant sickles on its forelegs. Unlike an ordinary praying mantis, though, this guy has six. Like an Asura. The wasps want to strike from the air, but they don't want to get in range of those sickles... what a stalemate.

As for me, I'm sneakily observing these proceedings from behind a rock. It looks like neither party has noticed me just yet. It looks like my Stealth skill is far more effective than I was giving it credit for! I sneak a peep over my rock in order to activate Appraisal.

Elro Greshgard: *A praying mantis-like monster that inhabits the Lower Depths of the Great Elro Labryinth. The attacks it makes with its sickles are extremely powerful.*

Oh! One of the wasps just got bisected by a sickle. Whooooa, those things must be crazy sharp to cut a wasp in half with a single blow! Man, if those things are that ridiculously sharp, they might even be able to cut through my silk! Well, since they haven't noticed me, I have the great privilege of just being able to sneakily scuttle by as I please.

Oh yeah, before I forget, I should look up these new vocabulary words I got from Appraisal.

The Lower Depths of the Great Elro Labyrinth: *The area between the middle and lowest strata of the Great Elro Labyrinth. Many powerful monsters inhabit this level.*

Ahhh, I see! These are the lower depths, huh... And there's even more below me, huhhh... And there's tons of strong monsters down here, huuhhhhh...

I didn't want to know any of that.

By the way, I did in fact try looking up the "middle stratum" and the "lowest stratum", but all I got was "the stratum in the middle" and "the stratum which, out of all of the strata, is the deepest." Why do I bother, Appraisal?

Although, it seems like this is not actually the deepest layer like I thought it was; there's even more below. I can't help but imagine that the bottom-most layer is packed to the gills with absurdly powerful monsters. Ugh, this is, of course, the world's largest dungeon, and when I think of a dungeon, I think of a place where the monsters get stronger and stronger the deeper in you go. If my current stratum really is filled with powerful monsters, then it's totally not unreasonable to think that the lowest layer could be crawling with Earth Dragon-class monsters. Just thinking about it gives me the chills.

That's far away, though. Hmm, if I had to guess, I'd say I probably was in the upper strata before. If humans were able to get in and out, those tunnels must have been connected to the surface somehow. Aaaargh, why didn't I follow after those footsteps instead of running away! Although, really, even if I did manage to follow them out, I still look like this... Just because I'm a spider, I'd still have to live out my life hunting like a monster.

But yeah, that really has nothing to do with things right now, right? I've got to figure out how to escape these lower depths, after all... which would put me in the middle layers, huh. Really, though, I don't even know if this tunnel connects to the middle layers at all! Maaaaan, I really want to avoid that lowest level.

Oh, another wasp died! It's not looking good for the wasps. Mantis, you're way strong! Hmm, isn't that thing way stronger than a snake? This is weird, I've been ranking the snakes as boss monsters... they don't even compare to that Earth Dragon, though, and if this praying mantis is so much stronger... The snake is plummeting down my rankings. This is pretty obvious, but... those snakes are nowhere near the toughest things on this level, are they?

Well, it's far too early to tell. It could be that the praying mantis is just way too strong.

...That is also a thought that needs correcting. Immediately after the third wasp was slain, something entirely unexpected happened to the praying mantis. In the blink of an eye, it was crushed between the mandibles of a giant spider.

Uh? Wait, wait... Seriously?

Greater Taratekt — LV 18 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Whoa. Is this what my Mega Evolution looks like? Really?

Greater Taratekt: *The evolved form of the spider-type monsters known as Taratekt. Their powerful, carnivorous fangs drip with deadly venom.*

Ohhhh! If I keep evolving, it that what I'll become!? It's still really small compared to "My Mother", that super-huge spider I saw way back when, but this thing is seriously over ten meters long! That praying mantis looks tiny now. ...Wait, was that thing taken down without the use of silk at all? Just with a bite? Wouldn't that require a stupidly high offense stat? Mine's still only 21! How many times am I going to have to evolve to turn into that thing...

Well, I should probably sneak away before I get spotted. Noooo way I can win against something like that.

Alright, I've learned one thing today: these lower depths are seriously bad news!! Why do I say that, you ask? It's pretty obvious!! All these monsters around me are so powerful that I don't even know if making a nest will be enough to beat them. Like I said before, Stealth is the last thread I'm clinging to. Was I too quick to flee, huh? Should I have seriously tried blasting through that swarm of wasps to get out of here, huh? Maaaaan, though, I'm not really feeling that sense of overwhelming doom like I was when that Earth Dragon was nearby, huh...

Although, I do know that there's monsters down here that the bees actually can kill, so maybe this isn't completely hopeless after all. Praying mantises and giant spiders are one thing, but the other monsters down here can't all be that strong, right? If I find a monster that I think I can take, I'll make a meal out of it, otherwise I'll just keep using Stealth to sneak by. By the way, my red status gauge hasn't dropped at all! If I can trust this display, I don't need to worry too much about food for the time being. I should be able to pick my targets freely, acting with the utmost caution. I don't want to blunder across anything else like the Earth Dragon, after all.

S6 Stats

The vast assembly hall stretches before me as I pass through the door. At the end of a long, red carpet, a man waits behind a pedestal, while a crowd of people watches us quietly from their rows of seats along the walls. Everyone in the audience is a high-ranking member of the nobility.

Sue and I proceed forth along the red carpet, walking majestically like we had been taught for this occasion. I can feel the pressure of every eye in the audience as they watch us, but I ignore it as best as I can.

After what feels like a lifetime, we stop before the pedestal, then kneel. The man behind the pedestal, who is in reality our father, the King Majus Delua Analeicht, turns to face us.

“Let us commence the rite of Appraisal,” intones the King, his majestic voice reverberating through the hall.

This man may be my father, but I haven’t met him more than a few times, so he does not feel very much like a family member. Instead, he gives off an air of a powerful ruler. It would be a serious understatement to say I’m nervous right now. The King has been continuing to speak, but I’ve barely heard a word he’s said.

“...Slaine Zagan Analeicht, rise.” “Yes, my Lord,” I reply, rising to my feet. “Begin the Appraisal.”

I step up onto the small stool in front of the pedestal. With my height, I wouldn’t have been able to reach the top without the stool to help. Set within the pedestal is a flawless black gem. This seems to be the Gem of Appraisal, but it’s smaller than I thought it was going to be, small enough to fit in an adult’s palm. I shake off my unexpected thoughts and place my hand on the gem. I concentrate on the word “Appraise”, just like I had been taught. In an instant, my stats are revealed.

Human — LV 1 — Slaine Zagan Analeicht

Statistics:

HP: 35/35 (green)

MP: 348/348 (blue)

SP: 35/35 (yellow), 35/35 (red)

Avg. Offense: 20

Avg. Defense: 20

Avg. Magic Power: 314

Avg. Resistance: 299

Avg. Speed: 20

Skills:

[Mana Perception (LV 8)] • [Mana Manipulation (LV 8)] • [Battle Magic (LV 6)] • [Mana Allocation (LV 5)] • [Offensive Magic (LV 3)] • [Accelerated MP Recovery (LV 7)] • [MP Consumption Reduction (LV 2)] • [Sword Skill (LV 3)] • [Destruction Enhancement (LV 2)] • [Battle Spirit (LV 2)] • [Willpower Allocation (LV 1)] • [Concentration (LV 5)] • [Aiming (LV 1)] • [Evasion (LV 1)] • [Enhanced Vision (LV 4)] • [Enhanced Hearing (LV 7)] • [Enhanced Smell (LV 2)] • [Enhanced Taste (LV 1)] • [Enhanced Touch (LV 1)] • [Life (LV 5)] • [Mana Pool (LV 8)] • [Alacrity (LV 5)] • [Endurance (LV 5)] • [Strength (LV 5)] • [Toughness (LV 5)] • [Magic Power (LV 8)] • [Resistance (LV 7)] • [Speed (LV 5)] • [Aegis of the Heavens] • [n % I =W]

Skill points available: 100,000

My stats appear in my mind's eye. Simultaneously, they are also projected high on the wall, like a screen, for the entire room to see. This screen is linked together with the Gem of Appraisal, so results can be displayed easily.

The crowd behind me begins to murmur. The King commands everyone to be silent, but the talking still continues. Based on that reaction alone, it looks like my stats are outside the norm. Quite honestly, this is the reaction I had been expecting.

My magic-related stats are, of course, quite high, as Anna could attest. In contrast, though, my physical stats are about where they should be for a child my age. Well, that's not quite accurate; they're definitely on the high side compared to my peers, but nowhere near the same extent as my magic stats. Hmm, my stats have become really unbalanced.

As for my skills, though, I know that there's some sort of Voice of God. If I understand it correctly, alerts you whenever your level rises or you gain a new skill. However, I have two skills that I wasn't told of at all: "Aegis of the Heavens" and one whose name looks garbled. I'm a little curious about both of those, so I try Appraising them.

***Aegis of the Heavens:** Blessed by the protection of Heaven. Any outcome you desire is made easier to obtain.*

***n % I = W:** Impossible to appraise.*

What the hell? Aegis of the Heavens is amazing. It's OP! Although, it does only say "easier to obtain", so it's not like the world will move exactly as I wish. This is an amazing skill, but I shouldn't lean on it too heavily.

The other skill, though, is much stranger. Not only is its name cryptic, the appraisal result is even worse! I have no idea what this skill could possibly be. Even a Gem of Appraisal of the highest quality can't glean any insight as to what this might be and, if Appraisal can't tell me anything, I have no idea how to explore it any further. I know nothing about this at all.

"Oh, that looks just like the one the Duke's daughter has!" says someone in the crowd. "That amazing prodigy, right?" asks someone else. "Yes," adds a third, "but it would appear that the Prince is just as talented... maybe even moreso!"

I've been catching snippets of conversation from the murmuring nobles behind me, usually comparing me to the daughter of a Duke. Is there seriously another child out there who is as gifted as I am? I thought Sue was the only one...

"Silence!!" thunders the King. The room quiets down immediately. The King presents me with a sheet of paper, on which my stats have been recorded by the magical writing device linked with the Gem of Appraisal. I respectfully accept it, bow deeply, and step back. My part of this ceremony is complete.

Next, Sue steps forward. Her results are roughly the same as mine, which causes the crowd to erupt into noise once more. The important difference, though, is that Sue lacks both the Aegis of the Heavens and that mystery skill.

46 The Law of the Jungle, or so I thought...

I stealthily move along. If I kept watching these guys fight, after all, I'd definitely have gotten dragged into it, so getting out of there immediately was the best idea. Maaaaan, these lower levels... That praying mantis... I thought it was ridiculously strong, but it's really just kind of average down here. There's not only the spider that devoured the mantis, but also winged lions and even a giant serpent that is probably the evolved form of one of those snakes from earlier. Truly, a peerless collection of monsters. No waaaaay.

I've been sneaking along, trying to avoid drawing attention to myself, and so far I've been able to slip past everything without being detected. Well, if I had been detected, it would have been all over, anyway.

For a while, I forced myself to keep moving constantly, not even stopping for sleep. After a while, my red stamina meter finally started to decrease again. I still have no idea what was keeping it maxed out before, but it seems like there's some kind of time limit on whatever it was. Before these thirty-eight points disappear, I'm definitely going to need find myself some food.

I couldn't find a target that I could actually defeat, though, so I tried to force myself to sleep. Let's be clear. I couldn't sleep at all. Obviously. Before, I could guarantee my safety while sleeping by building a basic home and sleeping in there. In a monster lair like this, though, I'd need more than just a basic home to guarantee my safety and, of course, anything more sturdily built would be way more conspicuous. I don't want to stand out at all.

If you have to ask me why, it's that the Earth Dragon is terrifying. If I build a decent nest, the Earth Dragon is probably going to come straight for me. What's that? I have a persecution complex? I don't know... The Earth Dragon is terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. Nope, nuh uh, no can do.

And, so, for the first time in my life, I slept without the comfort of a home. This was waaay too stressful! Until I tried it, I never could have imagined sleeping in the open was going to be so terrifying. Every time I started to nod off, the slightest sound would shock me awake, and then I'd start to nod off again. I got basically no decent sleep like that. Next time, I'm going to make a simple home, just for the peace of mind. It's not bad now, but if I wind up super sleep-deprived, something bad might happen. Ah, well, in my previous life I only really got four hours of sleep a day, so this might be okay after all.

Well, that's just my sleep problems. The real issue is food. I need to find a way to secure some food in this monster lair. This might be me being overly enthusiastic, but I think there's a simple enough way to make this happen. After all, there's a kind of food that I can obtain without breaking a sweat.

I thought it was a little odd, earlier. The strength of the monsters here is ridiculous! But, mixed in with those are some monsters that are way weaker, comparatively, the kinds that I saw back in the upper levels. Take the snake, for example. Ahaha, I never thought I'd be calling the snake weak!

Well, if there's weaker monsters, what do they eat? After all, the weak don't eat, they get eaten. That's the law of the jungle, and this dungeon follows it to the letter. But there's a tiny stream of weak things down here, the kinds of things that the wasps focus on as their main target.

So, after spending some time observing these weaker monsters, I've realized the common thread between all of them.

They're all extremely poisonous.

It's so obvious once you realize it. I was born with a little bit of Poison Resistance skill, so I didn't mind eating poisonous meat very much, but an ordinary person wouldn't want to eat poison! These guys might be weak, but any stronger monsters that don't have poison resistance would avoid eating them. This might even

work in my favor; if I get spotted, they might leave me alone because of my poison! Well, I say that, but it's really better not to be spotted to begin with, so I really should keep sneaking around.

So, what do these weak monsters eat? There's two kinds of food, as far as I can tell. The first is, of course, other weak monsters. This is the big one. The weak monsters have to compete with other weak monsters. If I stumble across one, and I know there's no weak monsters nearby, I can easily finish one off with a sneak attack.

The other one... well, it's what the weak monsters eat when there's literally no other choice.

Elro Gelraish — LV3 — *(failed to appraise status)*

These things look like flat, black bugs that somehow remind me of snails. They cling to the dungeon walls and slowly creep along them, exactly like a snail. Let's call them... snail-bugs. These snail-bugs are abundant down here. No matter where you look, you'll see at least one, stuck to a wall. That's how many there are. After learning about these things, I foolishly wondered why none of the other monsters were eating snail-bug when they were so omnipresent.

This was before I actually ate one.

Yep, that was foolish. My mind was made up, fighting this thing was inevitable and, well, this isn't the kind of thing I can take back. It was only after I ate it that I realized why the other monsters used it as an absolute last resort.

Yep, I ate one. I really ate one. Killing it was easy; I yanked it off the wall with a thread and finished it off immediately with Poison Fang. I had yet to uncover its true horror, however. "Time to dig in," I blithely thought. Ugh, why did I do that?

Snail-bugs are un-freaking-believably disgusting.

So, yeah! That taste was not of this mortal world! Sure, I've eaten a ton of rather gross things since I was reincarnated as a spider, but those flavors pale in comparison. It was so disgusting that I lost a few points of health! That was not food. My Decay Resistance skill went up! Under any sane criteria this is not a good thing for your food to do! If "waste not, want not" wasn't such a deeply-held personal belief, I wouldn't have taken another bite.

So, as you can see, there is food that I can easily obtain without breaking a sweat... but it comes bundled with such extreme pain. Well, if I had to pick between starving to death and eating food that merely makes me wish I was dead, I'd have to pick the option that doesn't involve actually dying. So, if I am out of literally every other option, I've got snail-bugs to eat. Let's pray it does not come down to that.

47 Torrents of Toxin

Another day after another day of sneakily, sneakily scuttling along. The labyrinthine zone from the upper area had a billion twisty little passages, but this has just been one long, unbroken passage. I mean, it's great that I can't get lost, but... if this passage happens to connect to the lowest levels, I'd be stuck, right...? Aaagh, let's not start imagining the worst. This road leads to the middle layers! Yes! I believe this completely!

Well then, my red meter's about to run out. I... did eat one of those snail-bugs earlier, but that is really, really an absolute last resort. Even now, I can see a few of them crawling around on the walls, but I can't really imagine myself willingly eating any of them. That's right! These things are that atrociously awful to eat.

So, while I've still got a few points left in this meter, I should try to find a more normal meal. ...Let's not worry about whether highly poisonous monsters are "normal" or not. Ah, well, it's not like I haven't eaten a bunch of them alreadyyy... Ugh, and now there's these guyyys... Why can't I find something tasty for ooonce! I really miss instant ramen.

Right, right! Front: clear! Rear: clear! Perimeter is clear of external threat! Perfect, perfect.

Elro Randanel — LV 8 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Randanel — LV 7 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Elro Randanel — LV 7 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Look at that, they're in a group of three, just like last time! What a friendly bunch. Their levels are way higher than the last group, though, as expected for things down in these lower levels. That level eight one might even level up soon, if level ten's their evolution threshold. Ah, what a bright future... that they will never see, heh.

I circle around behind them, hidden in the gloom. And then I deploy my brand-new weapon: a throwing net!! ...Huh? The name's kind of boring? Haha, it's fine, it's fine. Sometimes nothing really clever comes to mind, you know! "Silken Smasher" made me grin as soon as I thought of it, but coming up with names of that caliber every single time would be a huge pain!

So, without further ado, throwing net: GO!

Please do not be mistaken: this is no ordinary throwing net. This new weapon... argh, this really does need a name, hm... oh, what? An explanation? Right, right! This net collapses into a ball as I throw it, then springs open wide as soon as it reaches its target! This is my amazing new combination attack, mixing the precise craftsmanship of my Spider Silk and the dextrous control of my Thread Manipulation.

All three of them are wrapped up tightly in an instant! Ha ha hah! A great catch, a great catch! Now, as usual, let's end things with a little Poison Fang... *chomp!*

"You have earned the title [Poison User], and have been awarded the skills [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] and [Poison Magic (LV 1)]."

Oh? Ohhhh?! I got another tiiiiitlllllle!! It's a poison one? It's a poison one!! Man, I have been using nothing but poison since I was born, and this is only finally showing up? These must be some strict requirements! Hm, now that I think about it, though, all of my titles have had some pretty harsh entry conditions... maybe they're just hard to earn in general? Ah, well, I've got this one now so it's not a problem.

Now, the skills, “Poison Synthesis” and “Poison Magic”, huh... Well, I’m going to just ignore Poison Magic because I still have absolutely no idea how to use it at all. Throw it on the magical garbage heap I’m accumulating. Poison Synthesis, hmm, might share the same fate. How do I use this thing? “Synthesis” huh, so, do I use this to make poison? I’m a spider, though, I can make my own poison already.

Ah, no, no, let’s not waste time messing with my skills. I still have work to do! There are still two more of these things that need to be disposed of. So, with my Poison Fangs... *chomp!*

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Poison Fang (LV 7)] has been raised to level 8.”

Oh? Ohhh?! OHHHHH?! What’s today’s forecast, poison with a chance of more poison? This is great, this is great! If level ten is the maximum skill level, my poison should be getting way stronger now that it’s at level eight. It already could take down those wasps, who I assume were venomous themselves. This is way easier than getting titles, hah.

Right. Let’s take these three dead things and hide amongst the crags. Ergh, man, with my terrible physical stats, carrying three of these at once is extremely difficult! Man, if I’d carried these things one at a time, I might have had an easier time but... huh? Didn’t I complain about this exact same problem a while ago, you ask? Didn’t I come up with exactly the same solution the last time, you ask? Hmmmmmm? I know nothing about anything like that! I don’t remember that at all, and my memory is nowhere close to bad, so it can’t have happened. You got that? Good.

Well, while I’m stuck here eating, I might as well play around with Poison Synthesis some. Of course, I have no real clues about how to begin, so, uh... I’m basically just going to take a wild guess. So, deep in my heart, I silently whisper, “Poison Synthesis.”

Huh, and something actually popped into my head. Just like with Appraisal, I can see a status window floating in my mind’s eye.

Poison Synthesis Menu:

Weak Poison
Spider Venom (LV 8)

What the heck? Oh, well, if it’s displayed like this, let’s try using Appraisal to read up on it...

Poison Synthesis Menu: From here, you may synthesize poison.

Weak poison: An extremely weak poison.

Spider Venom (LV 8): A lethal venom secreted by spiders. At level 8, it is extremely potent.

Umf. “Spider Venom” is undoubtedly my own poison. This “Weak Poison”, is it what a level one Poison Synthesis can normally make? To try it out, I select Weak Poison. As I watch, a ball of liquid bubbles into being in mid-air, then suddenly drops to the ground with a splash. Whoops. I really should find a container for this, shouldn’t I? Just to be sure, I appraise the puddle.

Puddle of weak poison

Yeah, that’s weak poison, all right. I see... it looks like Poison Synthesis is a skill that can conjure up poison without needing any materials at all. If I was a human, this would be super useful, but I’m a spider, you know. Well, I might be able to come up with a use for it anyway. Yeah, a no-cost way of generating poison is pretty awesome, after all.

Ah, no, wait, my mana’s gone down a bit. Looks like it’s not completely free, after all. That’s another big strike against it. I guess that if I keep leveling it up I might gain access to a larger variety of poisons, but I’ve already got my super-powerful spider venom! This isn’t very appealing at all. I’m glad that I figured out how

to use it, though. This is, at the very least, way more useful than the completely incomprehensible magic system.

48 A fork in the... path?

After all this time following this long, dangerous tunnel through the lower depths, I've finally, finally, found it! A fork in the path! ...uh, the path?

Yeah. An impossibly large cavern stretches out into the distance before me. Here, the path forks... er, here, the path opens wide... uh, here, the path disappears...? If you asked me to tell you how big it is, I couldn't; even with my ultra-powerful night vision cutting effortlessly through the darkness, I can't see the other side.

Uhhhh... which way should I go now? I couldn't get lost while I was following a single straight line, but in this enormous, empty space, I'm kinda worried. It's kinda like... suddenly finding yourself in a desert with no path or landmarks to guide you. I don't even know which way I should be facing! This is dreadful.

I heard that if you keep constantly walking forward in a place where the scenery doesn't change, you'll subconsciously wander in a huge arc and eventually wind up back where you started. Of course, I'm a spider, not a human, so I actually have no idea how true that is for me. There's not really much around here that I could use as a landmark, just crags and pillars scattered here and there. I can't really find anything unique about any of them, so using them as landmarks isn't really possible. There's snail-bugs around here, so even in the worst case scenario I'm not going to die of hunger, but there's going to be no way for me to notice if I'm getting lost.

Well, it's time once to break out the most basic maze-solving skill: follow the wall. I'll keep the wall on my right side as I advance.

But, man, this place is huge. It's not just extremely broad, horizontally, but it's ridiculously tall as well! The pillars holding up the ceiling have to be over a hundred meters tall. What spectacular height. Even though I'm still stuck in this dungeon, I don't feel like I'm cooped up anymore. How do I say this... even though there's nothing here but rock, this cavern exemplifies the glory of Mother Nature. In here, I am reminded of how small I truly am.

In my previous life, I saw a TV show that talked about the unexplored parts of the world. Honestly, I can't say that I felt moved at all when I was watching it back then. No matter how beautiful the images on the screen were, in the end they were just figments of a distant world that had absolutely nothing to do with me. I felt no excitement, no wonder; just indifference. I honestly don't even know why I was watching it.

But now, I'm here. This is the world I'm living in. This isn't irrelevant. I can't be indifferent! Being this moved by my surroundings is something I had never experienced when I was a human. I probably wouldn't have ever been able to come here, too, if I had kept myself cooped up in the nest I called my home. I really should thank that pyromaniac human for forcing me out into the outside world.

...Ah, but even just thinking about it still makes me mad. Yeah, right. Like there's any way I could be grateful to a jerk like that. Next time I meet him, I'll roll him up nice and tight in my silk, drag him around the dungeon for a while, and then finish him off with a Poison Fang.

Hoooof. That's an unpleasant memory to drag up. Let's put that aside, gaze once more at the grandeur of nature, and be calmed.

Bagragrach — LV 14 — (*failed to appraise statistics*)

A giant monster lumbers into view. From its build and attitude, it looks kinda slow and lazy, and a little bit stupid too... but that mouth shatters that impression immediately. That giant, crocodile-like mouth, bursting with countless jagged teeth. The monkey-like body attached to that terrible maw looks kind of unbalanced, but brutal.

This isn't calming at aaaaall...

Yeah, that's right. This is a dungeon. This isn't nature; this is danger. Comprende? Yeah.

And, so, I slip away into the murk and make my escape.

* * *

Somehow, I made it out without being seen. You know, I just had a really terrible thought, that I really wish I didn't have. Could this enormous cavern be, uh, could it maybe be the bottom-most layer?

I don't really know how far apart layers are supposed to be, but it's not unthinkable that I could have gone down a level while following that extremely long road. With such a long, straight tunnel, if it had just a tiny little slope to it, I could easily have gone up or down a fair way without noticing anything at all. It's a possibility, right...?

No, no, no. It can't be, right? That's just an ordinary huge cavern. Yeah. Or maybe it's part of the middle layers! Aha, let's go with that! These are definitely the middle layers! Haha, oh man, it was way easier to get out of the lower levels than I had expected!

Bagrgrach — LV 8 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Bagrgrach — LV 4 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Bagrgrach — LV 11 — *(failed to appraise statistics)*

Man, what are these guys doing in the middle layer? I make like the Invisible Man... wait, no, the Invisible Spid... ah, forget it. I sink into the shadows and sneakily scuttle away.

After I put a bunch of distance between me and them, I remember that I haven't actually gotten around to appraising their species yet.

Bagrgrach: A monster with a giant, deformed jaw. They work together, bringing down their pray as a pack.

Uh-huh... so they're not just strong, they hunt in packs, huh... I've really got no chance, huh...

Yyyeah. It's starting to look like this isn't the middle layer after all. How could it be, with this kind of difficulty level? Ugh. I really, really hope this isn't the bottom layer.

49 Hey, Appraisal, I guess you're OP after all.

I move stealthily, keeping close to the wall. So, ever since I ate those three monsters a little while ago, my red stamina meter has once again gotten stuck at its maximum value. Hmmm? Sure, it was a lot of food; eating just one of those things was almost enough to max me out, but... Now that I think about it, could this maybe be the result of my Overeating skill? If I eat more than I need, does the excess get stockpiled somewhere? This effect did start happening after I acquired that skill, after all... Hmm, this doesn't seem like such a wild guess.

“Proficiency requirements met. Your skill, [Appraisal (LV 6)] has been raised to level 7.”

Oh? OH?! OHHHH?!?! Appraisal!! Miss Appraisal, you came!! What a glorious day!

Is it okay if I get my hopes up a bit, since you got way more awesome last time? It's okay, right? You wouldn't let me down, right? We've cleared that hurdle already, getting this high, right? You're not going to crash into it, right? Now, the results are...?!

Small Taratekt — LV 3 — (no name)

Statistics:

HP: 38/38 (green)

MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 38/38 (yellow), 38/38 (red)

Avg. Offense: 21

Avg. Defense: 21

Avg. Magic Power: 19

Avg. Resistance: 19

Avg. Speed: 369

Skills:

[Automatic HP Recovery (LV 2)] • [Poison Fang (LV 8)] • [Poison Synthesis (LV 1)] • [Spider Silk (LV 8)] • [Thread Manipulation (LV 5)] • [Throw (LV 1)] • [Concentration (LV 1)] • [Aiming (LV 1)] • [Appraisal (LV 7)] • [Detection (LV 3)] • [Stealth (LV 5)] • [Dark Magic (LV 2)] • [Shadow Magic (LV 1)] • [Poison Magic (LV 1)] • [Overeating (LV 3)] • [Night Vision (LV 10)] • [Visible Spectrum Expansion (LV 1)] • [Poison Resistance (LV 7)] • [Paralysis Resistance (LV 3)] • [Petrification Resistance (LV 2)] • [Acid Resistance (LV 3)] • [Decay Resistance (LV 3)] • [Fear Resistance (LV 5)] • [Ignore Pain] • [Pain Tolerance (LV 5)] • [Strength (LV 2)] • [Toughness (LV 2)] • [Kartikeya (LV 2)] • [Taboo (LV 2)] • [n % I = W]

Eh? Really? Seriously?! I'm not seeing things, right?! Oh. Oh! Ohh! WHOOOOOAAHHHHHH?! Skills!! My skills showed up!! Miss Appraisal, you do excellent work! You cleared that hurdle splendidly! Yahoo! You're really making something of yourself!

Appraisal, you're seriously amazing! Thank you so much. Seriously, thank you! With this... with this, I can finally double-Appraise all of the skills I know nothing about and get a description! So... whoooo's... FIRST?!

Right, first up is Overeating, since I was just thinking about it.

Overeating: A skill which makes it possible to eat beyond one's normal capacity. The stamina that would have been gained from the extra food is stockpiled for future use; however, this causes the user to become fat. As the level increases, the amount that may be stockpiled increases.

Ah, aaaah... Oh ho! It's just as I thought! In other words, it's a skill that, after I eat a ton, stops my Stamina from going down for a while. I'll get fat, though, huh? Am... am I fat?! I don't know how I feel about that. I mean, I'm a spider, so is it really that bad? If I were human, of course, it would be a huge drawback.

Next is... this, I guess!

Strength: A skill which applies an increase to your physical offensive capabilities, proportionate to its level.

Huh. Is that what that is? Just a basic stat-boosting skill. Oh that's right, after I leveled up, this skill leveled up too. When I leveled up my offensive power went up by 2 instead of 1 like some of my other stats did; maybe that's thanks to this skill. So that must mean...

Toughness: A skill which applies an increase to your physical defensive capabilities, proportionate to its level.

Aha, just as I thought, this skill's the defensive version of Strength. Umf, the effect might be a little weak, but since my stats are such garbage, I'll take every tiny little boost I can get.

Let's keep going! Next is... this one, that I've never seen before. It's level two, so it must have leveled up at some point... did I miss something the "Voice of Heaven" said?

Kartikeya: A skill which applies an increase to your speed, proportionate to one hundred times its level. In addition, when leveling up, this skill increases your base Speed statistic by ten times the level of this skill.

Huh? Ahh... uh... huh? Ah... is that why my speed was so ridiculously fast, huh... right... right... WHAAAAAAT?!

Wh... what the heck is this ridiculous skill? I thought for sure that my entire species was this fast, but it was this?! Whoa. Kartikeya... is this the special privilege of a transmigrated soul?! Oh! Is that it?! Thank the gods! An amazing rare skill, bestowed upon me at birth? Transmigration privilege is awesome! I didn't earn the nickname Kartikeya in that MMO for nothing! Hee! I'm getting pretty hype!

Now... what's this other skill I haven't seen before?

n % I = W: Impossible to appraise.

Uh? "Impossible to appraise"? What the heck? ...Huh. After all that, a fumble. Well... just from the name, this kinda looks like a bug. I don't really like not knowing what it is, but if I can't Appraise it I guess it can't really be helped. I just hope it doesn't have a detrimental effect, that's all.

I take a moment to collect my thoughts, then check the next skill.

Taboo: A skill earned by breaking taboos. You must not raise this skill.

Whoa. This is a profoundly mysterious description. It seems kinda obvious, though, that this is some kind of penalty, like a curse. Ugh, I don't want this. "You must not raise this skill," it says, but it's already level 2... Seriously? Maaaaan... that killed my hype.

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Automatic HP Recovery: Gradually restores lost HP. Allows for recovery of injuries that would not heal naturally.

Poison Fang: Grants the Poison attribute to the user's bite attack.

Poison Synthesis: Consumes MP to customize and purify poisons. The kinds of poison that may be synthesized are dependent on skill level. Available poisons: Weak Poison (LV 1)

Spider Silk: A unique skill possessed only by spiders and spider-like organisms. Produces customizable silk threads. Attributes available to customize: adhesion, elasticity, resilience, texture, strength, and size.

Thread Manipulation: Allows the user to freely manipulate thread.

Throw: When throwing something, increases the strength and accuracy of the throw.

Concentration: Increases the ability to concentrate.

Aiming: Increases the user's accuracy rate, in every circumstance.

Appraisal: Displays information about various things.

Detection: A composite skill that encompasses every perception skill in the system. Skills included: Mana Perception, Spell Pattern Perception, Material Perception, Presence Detection, Danger Sense, Motion Detection, Thermal Perception, Reaction Detection, and Spatial Perception.

Stealth: Conceals the user's presence.

Night Vision: Provides a sense of sight even when no light sources exist.

Visible Spectrum Expansion: Widens the band of frequencies that the user is capable of perceiving.

Poison Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Poison attribute.

Paralysis Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Paralysis attribute.

Petrification Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Petrification attribute.

Acid Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Acid attribute.

Decay Resistance: Increases the user's defense against the Decay attribute.

Fear Resistance: Stifles feelings of terror.

Ignore Pain: Completely negates the restrictive effects of pain on the user's mind and body.

Pain Tolerance: Lessens the sense of pain, while preserving the sense of danger pain would ordinarily provide.

I appraise the remaining skills in one go. Generally, everything's as I thought it was going to be, but there was a bit of new information in there as well.

The “Visible Spectrum Expansion” skill, for instance, has finally been explained. This will let me see infrared and ultraviolet radiation... right? I can’t really see anything, though... Oh, I guess I only have one level in it, so it’s not going to do all that much. It’s also totally possible that there isn’t much infrared or ultraviolet radiation bouncing around inside a dungeon. Well, it hasn’t been bothering me so far, so I guess I don’t really care!

I also analyzed the various attributes in the resistance system, and, uh, found something kinda terrible. Most of the attributes are pretty much exactly what they say on the box, but... one of them doesn’t really quite match up.

Decay Attribute: *Encompasses the breakdown and collapse of matter, such as that associated with death.*

What the heck? Scary. I thought it was just a skill that made it okay for me to eat meat that was a little rotten, but this is a really weird attribute. My Decay Resistance went up when I ate one of those snail-bugs... do they have this attribute? Whoa. That... explains that terrible, unearthly taste. Ugh. Eating those things is absolutely the last resort.

The next thing that I got curious about was Detection. It’s way, way more high-power than I had originally thought. “Every perception skill in the system”? Shouldn’t I have had to spend more than just 100 points on that? Can I use them one at a time? Nooooope. Man, seriously, I want to figure out what each one of these things does individually, but it looks like I have to activate everything simultaneously. My options are “on” and “off”, nothing for the individual skills. I really want to use “Presence Detection” and “Danger Sense”, but when everything is activated simultaneously I can’t tell the bits of information I want from all the rest of the information that’s coming in.

There’s no way my tiny little brain can process all of that; if I try, a headache will be the least of my worries. On top of that, when I turned it on just to test it a little while, the level went up again! Now it assaults me with even more useless information! Until I find a skill that makes my brain work better, I can’t use this at all. This skill is awesome because it’s so high-power... but it’s also basically impossible to use.

‘Twas caviar to the general, pearls cast before swine, Detection for a spider. Ugh.

Well, onto the last thing, the skills that have the highest chance of having their true potential unlocked through Appraisal: my three magic skills. The skills that I’ve had to leave aside all this time because I had no idea how to use them. The skills that would be infinitely more useful if I knew how they worked. If I knew that, I’d be able to truly call myself a magician. Yeah! Appraisal, if you would?!

Corruption Magic: *Magic that directly affects the soul. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: Disquiet (LV 1), Phantom Pain (LV 2)*

Shadow Magic: *A low-rank Darkness magic that manipulates shadows. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: Deep Shadow (LV 1)*

Poison Magic: *Magic that manipulates poison. The spells that may be cast are dependent on skill level. Available spells: Poison Touch (LV 1)*

Oh? Ohh? Hmm... Questionable. Well, don’t get me wrong, compared to when I knew absolutely nothing this is a night-and-day difference... but I still have no idea how to use it. Corruption Magic... these are mind-affecting spells, right? Shadow and Poison... well, they’re pretty obvious. Some of these even look like they might be useful even at level one! They might be useful... but how the heck do I activate them? Should I just try doing it like I did with Appraisal, just kinda chanting the name to myself.

Right. Now then... *Disquiet!*

...

Nothing happened. Ah, well, maybe it was a misfire because I didn't aim it at a target. Let's try a different spell. *Deep Shadow!*

...

Nothing there either. *Poison Touch!*

...

Nothing's happening! My mana isn't even being drained. Forget misfiring or targeting errors, I don't think I'm even firing anything to begin with. Seriouslyyyyyy. I got my hopes up a little, but I guess it was useless after all. Ah, wait up a bit? Maybe if I try appraising "magic" by itself, it'll give me a little hint...?

Magic: *A phenomenon where a user may channel mana through a skill, producing an effect.*“

Yeeep, no good after all. Uuughhh, I still can't use any magic!! Well, shit. My magical-girl debut as _"Mahou Shoujo Magical Kumoko"_¹⁶ is still a long ways away, isn't it. Fuck.

¹⁶ Literally, "Magical Girl: Magical Spider-Girl". I left this relatively untranslated because a lot of anime titles like that have been left untranslated.

S7 The Duke's Daughter

The Appraisal ceremony finished without a hitch, apart from that little commotion. It seems that what had everyone talking wasn't just the fact that Sue's stats and mine were both abnormally high. Thanks to my enhanced sense of hearing, I was able to eavesdrop a little on the nobles' discussions. It seems that skill points are normally only supposed to be granted when you level up, so starting with a hundred thousand at level one isn't normal at all. Sue, now that I think about it, has zero. I'd bet that this is because I've reincarnated, but what's interesting is that I keep overhearing that "the duke's daughter" also was born with skill points.

From what these nobles are saying, it sounds like the duke's daughter was Appraised a few days ago. They found that not only did she have phenomenally high stats, she also had skill points she wasn't supposed to. On top of that, they're saying that she also has the same skill with the strange, glitchy name that I do.

I come to a sudden realization: if what I'm hearing is correct, I absolutely must meet this daughter of a duke. My chance, luckily, arrived quickly.

After the Appraisal ceremony, we were led to a different assembly hall, where a small party was being held. Accompanied by the king, we went to meet a group of young nobles that had lined up in the center of the room. These children are generally around my age or slightly older; it seems that this is a way for the younger generation of the nobility to introduce themselves to each other. There, I got a chance to meet the duke's daughter.

"It is a great pleasure to meet you, my lord. I am the daughter of the Duke of Anabald, Carnatia Seli Anabald," she says.

She is beautiful, with bright red hair like a raging flame and a fierce face that reveals her strong-willed disposition. Her presence captivates the attention with just a single glance. Not only that, I can see through my Mana Perception the huge mass of magical energy that billows around her. She has as much as Sue and I do.

The Duke of Anabald, incidentally, is among the country's most renowned members of the aristocracy. House Anabald has served the country for many generations, and their proud lineage has produced royalty and heroes. Every child born to the House of Anabald is supremely gifted, and their talents are finely honed by rigorous education so that they may be raised as the finest servants of their country.

Even so, the girl before me is abnormal. She seems to have already surpassed her father, the red-haired man who stands next to her.

"Greetings," I reply, "I am Slaine Zagan Analeicht. *Nice to meet you.*"

To test my realization from earlier, I said the last part in Japanese. For an instant, her eyes went wide, and I knew at once that I had been completely right.

"Father, may I speak with this girl?" I ask. "Eh?" replies the king.

He seems a little puzzled by my actions. The duke and his daughter, after all, were at the head of a long line of other children, brought in to meet me. However, I couldn't let this chance slip past me.

"Should I not?" "Hmm..."

The king glances at me, then at the duke, then at the other nobles still waiting in line, contemplating his options. Finally, he opens his mouth to speak.

“I don’t mind. Don’t be gone for too long. Come back in a little while.” “Yes, Father. Thank you.”

I grab the duke’s daughter’s hand and run off, like a little kid. Behind me, Sue started sulking incredibly, but I paid it no mind.

We left the assembly hall and found a private chamber off of the waiting room. Rooms such as these were set up near the assembly halls so that any nobles who needed to slip away to conduct private transactions could do so. This room is tightly soundproofed, and a guard stationed at the door outside adds additional security. “Ahh, this’ll do,” I say, talking in Japanese now that I have nothing to hide.

“I would have never guessed that the prince would seriously be another reincarnated person!” says the duke’s daughter, also speaking in Japanese. “Oh maaan, it’s been so long since I heard Japanese coming out of another person’s mouth! I’m getting a little emotional here.” She still looks as strong-willed as ever, but her tone is light.

“So, I’d like to know... do you remember Heishin High?” I ask, referring to my old school.

“Holy crap, yeah! We’re seriously both from the same school and reincarnated in this world, huh?”

As I feared, this young woman was, just like me, caught up in that mysterious mid-air crack in the classroom and transported here; a former classmate.

“My old name was Shunsuke Yamada,” I say. “What was yours?” “Bwha?!” As soon as I say my old name, her eyes practically fly out of their sockets. “Ahahahahaha! H... hahaha! Y... you’re... Shun! Shun, a prince, haha, as fucking iiiif!”

The young woman lets out an enormous roar of laughter. What’s with this deja vu? The girl in front of me looks nothing like anyone I know, but this style of speech, these mannerisms, I remember them.

“Are you... no way, are you Kanata?” I ask, incredulously. “Yeah!”

Now it’s my turn to laugh. Kanata, the guy I used to play games with all the time, my best friend, is now a young woman. I don’t know if it would have been possible for him to have been reincarnated as anything less like his old self.

“Man, don’t laugh! I was seriously depressed about this for a while after I was reborn, you know?” “Ahaaa, my bad. You were laughing at me just now though! Let’s call it even.” “Yeah. I’m so glad I met you again, though! It’s been rough so far, dealing with this all on my own.” “Ahh, yeah, I totally understand. I’m glad we met too.”

Kanata and I bump fists.

Immediately, an ear-splitting sound roars through the soundproofed door. “What the?!” yells Kanata, panicking. I also panic for an instant, but as soon as I realize who was on the other side, I calm down. Or, rather, I started panicking for a different reason.

With another roar, the door flies off its hinges and crashes into the room. On the other side, I see Sue, her body strengthened with Battle Magic and mana gathering in her fist for another strike. She peers at the two of us, then locks on to Kanata.

“Sue, no! Stop! Stop!!” I dive between them, just barely before Sue was going to blow Kanata to pieces.

Sue runs forward and clings to me tightly. “I won’t let anyone else have you,” she mumbles.

“Your sister’s scaaaary...” says Kanata, in Japanese.

On that day, I met my first classmate.